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AN OCEAN FREE-LANCE.

FROM A PRIVATEERSMAN'S LOG, 1812.

BY

W. CLARK RUSSELL,

AUTHOR OF 'THE WRECK OF THE GROSVENOR,' ETC.

'Oh, who can tell, save he whose heart hath tried,
And danced in triumph o'er the waters wide,
The exulting sense—the pulse's maddening play
That thrills the wanderer of that trackless way?
That, for itself can woo the approaching fight,
And turn what some deem danger to delight!'

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



LONDON:

RICHARD BENTLEY AND SON,

Publishers in Ordinary to Her Majesty the Queen.

1881.

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AN OCEAN FREE-LANCE.



CHAPTER I.

THE DROIT MARITIME.



O fetch the latitude we wanted to make, we had about a hundred and thirty miles to run; we had therefore much more time on our hands than we needed. At least that would have been the notion, with the breeze that was blowing when we parted with the *Bombay Castle*; but about half an hour before sunset the wind dropped, veered to the west, and expired after a few faint puffs.

I was below in the cabin, talking with Shelvocke over the old ship we had just left, and he was laughing over Peppercorn and mimicking the way in which that tough-and-dry old chap had bragged about his pluck in giving the slip to H.M.S. *Gipsy*, that was convoying him and five other Indiamen home.

‘As if there was anything particularly heroic in a man risking a run without protection from the latitude of St. Helena, with two hundred and eighty troops aboard, sixty seamen, and fourteen long nine-pounders, not to speak of six *quakers*!’ said Shelvocke.

‘He matches his ship well,’ said I. ‘His parched face and old brown scratch and flapping skirts are in perfect keeping with the hooker’s mountainous stern and house-windows. Captain Peppercorn doesn’t look like a man who will die the usual death; he’ll fossilise, sir: and should the old *Bombay Castle* outlive him, his executors would do well to hand him over to Hannay & Co. as a figure-head for the ship.’

‘You don’t fancy the old fellow thinks of

dying, do you ?' exclaimed Shelvocke, laughing heartily ; ' why, he's going to be *married* as soon as he gets ashore. The lady was aboard, he told me, but he wouldn't point her out. I begged hard for a sight of her, but he only dug his elbow into my ribs, and grinned until I thought his eyes were quenched for ever. Imagine the rogue having the impudence to get married ! I asked him what his age was : he reflected and answered that he believed he was the wrong side of fifty ; " but," said he, " when I was born the registration of children's ages was a very imperfect job, so perhaps I'm not so old as I suppose." Now, I *know* he won't see his seventy-second year again. " Really, Peppercorn," said I, " you look wonderfully young for your age !" " D'ye think so, Shelvocke ?" said he, in his old cracked fiddle. " Ay, wonderfully young ; and let me assure you Peppercorn," said I, " it comforts me to feel you are not old enough to firmly believe that your sweetheart admires you *only* for your beauty. That solace is reserved until you shall be turned seventy !" " Ah ! there

is no telling what I may believe should I live to attain so great an age," quavered the old hypocrite ; but for all that he wouldn't point me out his affianced one. From which I suspect she's a chicken.'

'Not one of the three beauties, I hope!' I exclaimed ; and I was about to sing the praises of violet eyes and auburn hair, when Chestree thrust his ugly mug into the cabin, and said that the boatswain wished to speak to the captain.

'Well, Mr. Tiptree, what is it you want ?' inquired Shelvocke of the fine, well-made fellow who stood at the door, cap in hand, his face shining like the top of a mahogany dining-table, while drops of perspiration, induced as much by nervousness as the heat, trickled down his cheeks into his enormous whiskers, which extended from under his ears to the corners of his mouth, and looked like a couple of door-mats slung by lariards athwart his jowls. His silver pipe hung just below the point where his open shirt disclosed his mossy breast and a throat whose massive and muscular proportions might have

been copied for a painting of a Roman gladiator. Over his shirt he wore a short jacket, braided at the sleeves, and breasted with double rows of cloth buttons, while he occasionally plucked at the band of a pair of white drill bags flowing down to his small well-polished shoes in expanding folds like a ship's wake, that broadens the further it goes astern. He was, I think, as perfect a type as any seaman that ever I met, of the better class of the mariners of that age, alert as a cat, tough as a spar of upland spruce, fearless from native resolution and force of character than from what I have sometimes thought an *instinctive* indifference to death, extremely fond of rum, capable of doing the work of five men at a pinch, and hating the French like poison.

‘If you please, sir,’ said he, going through various preliminary manœuvres in the shape of shifting his quid out of one cheek into another, tricing up his trousers, looking into the bottom of his cap, and wiping his heated forehead on the sleeve of his jacket, ‘the men have begged me for to come, Captain Shel-

vocke, to ask if your honour 'ud object to their having a bit o' toe-and-heelin' forrard—a kind o' all-round tom-foolin'. They can muster two wiolins, sir.'

'Why not put your real question straight, and ask for a can of grog to shove some spring into the fellows' toes? You know that is what the crew mean,' said Shelvocke, good-naturedly, Tiptree being a great favourite of his. 'How's the weather?'

'Quiet as the bottom of a well, sir,' answered Tiptree, grinning broadly, and not without an expression of admiration at the skipper's sharpness.

'Well, you may tell the steward to serve out a glass of grog to each man, and as it will be getting dark soon, you can get the lanterns ready for slinging. See that the humour don't get too boisterous, Tiptree.'

'Ay, ay, sir ;' and evidently much gratified by the quick success of his errand, the boat-swain withdrew.

'It's just this sort of sympathy with the crew that makes Tiptree the valuable fellow he is,' said Shelvocke ; 'there's not a man aboard

that wouldn't risk his neck to serve him. You had better get on deck, Mr. Madison, that your presence may stop any excessive horse-play; and let the mates keep a bright look-out around, for it won't do for an enemy's ship to bowl down upon us with a breeze, and find us dancing.'

The sun was half immersed when I reached the deck, and I stood a few moments watching the glorious sight, and thinking that if ever a glimpse of the Paradise of Christians — 'and the building of the wall it was of jasper, and the city was pure gold, like unto clear glass' — is obtained by us dwellers on earth, it is when the semi-sunken sun flashes upon the western sky a thousand heavenly hues — ruby and amethyst, and opal and pearl, and violet, with the soft melting of the warm orange into the pale amber — when the hovering clouds make a vista of golden-edged porches which provoke the eye into searching through them the infinite depths beyond, whose light is 'like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal' — when the blinding glory upon the sea ap-

pears rather the reflection of the opening Paradise in that mirror of Eternity, the Deep, than the flashing of a luminary upon water. Such a sunset I was now witnessing, and I stood fascinated by its magnificence, watching the upper limb of the sun growing smaller and smaller, until but a tiny fragment of it glowed upon the polished water-line, like a red-hot cinder, while the radiant reflection shortened as though a band of bright gold were being drawn away from us along the water, until the last spark vanished, and the colours began to fade.

‘Beautiful!’ I exclaimed, unconsciously speaking aloud.

‘Beautiful indeed, sir!’ echoed a melodious voice at my side; ‘who can look at such a sight as that and believe that the bright home beyond the skies that has been promised to men is a superstitious fancy?’

‘Why, Mr. Peacock,’ said I, struck by the peculiar melancholy in his large dark eyes, ‘it is strange that you should put my very identical musings into words.’ But I suppose the thoughts bred in you and me by that

sunset are not peculiar to us two. What makes you even suggest that heaven may be a superstitious fancy? The most generous and the best faiths a man has belong to his boyhood, and though you are no longer a boy in years, let me advise you to remain a boy in religion. You may take the word of wiser men than I that you will want more brains than yours or any mortal skull is likely to hold, to improve upon your mother's creed.'

'My mother was a Catholic, sir,' he replied, as though he fancied that would rather confound my reckoning.

'And what of that? I hope you are not ashamed of your mother's faith?'

A dark blush came into his face, and a dangerous devil into his eyes. I once saw such a look in a very handsome young Spanish captive who was being twitted by an ill-bred English officer for wearing a silver crucifix under his shirt.

'I *am* ashamed of it, if I *must* speak the truth,' he exclaimed. 'I am ashamed of having been born a Catholic, though I am a

staunch Protestant now, sir. Perhaps *you* may be a Catholic, Mr. Madison, but I shall not apologise for what I have said ; I *hate*—' He seemed about to deliver some mighty violent sentence, but checked himself, touched his cap and walked over to the gangway, where he stood watching the movements of the men, apparently with great interest.

I thought all this very curious, and it was more so to my mind than I can well make clear by the significance imparted to every word and look of the youth by his beauty, his melodious voice, and the refinement and breeding that was exhibited in his person and manners.

The steward was on the main-deck serving out a gill of rum to each of the crew from a huge can filled with the dark liquor, and it would at any other time have amused me to watch the men coming up with grave faces, some of them tipping down the grog raw from the steward's pewter measure, but most of them carrying the dose forward in tin pannikins, whilst those who had been already served were busy in clearing up the decks,

slinging the lanterns for lighting, and making ready for the dancing. But my mind was full of young Peacock, and knowing that Chestree had been shipmate with him in one voyage, if not two, and observing that worthy standing near the launch gaping around the sea, with his cap at the back of his head and his immense mouth open, like a newly-landed fish, to catch every draught of air from the occasional gentle flap of the main-sail, I went up to him, and broke ground by telling him not to attend to the dancing, but to help me to watch for any wind that might come, and for any sail it might bring along with it.

‘I doubt if there’ll be any wind this side of midnight, sir,’ he answered; ‘but let it come when it will, I’ll report it fast enough if I’m on deck.’

‘I’ve just been having a little talk with Peacock,’ said I;—‘now *don’t* stare at him, Chestree—and I have been rather surprised by a smart exhibition of prejudice. How comes a young fellow like him, who has been half his life at sea, to be troubled with

long-shore antipathies of any kind? Who is he? or rather, what *was* he—do you know?’

Here I thought, but it might have been my fancy, that Chestree grew grave; but it was difficult to interpret the thoughts of a man from a face that, in consequence of the heat, was nearly all mouth.

‘Why, sir, all that I know of Peacock is,’ he answered, ‘that he’s a love-child. Who his mother was I can’t say; but she wasn’t English. I remember a big apprentice aboard the *Fattysalam* smoking the poor little chap—he was a little chap then, sir—and asking him what port his mother hailed from, and if his father knew he was out, until all on a sudden the boy seized a knife and sprang upon the bully; just as in Bombay once I saw a little slip of a Hindoo Shylock fly at an Englishman, and catch his throat in his teeth, and hold on in that way until he was dragged off with a pound of bleeding flesh between his lips. The apprentice roared murder, and fell sprawling on his back, and that saved his life, for young Peacock was seized with the knife

poised ready for the heart of the brute who had goaded him. I think little Peacock was raving mad for some minutes, but his treatment of the apprentice shut up all jokes after that. How we got to know he was a natural child, and that his mother wasn't English, I am sure I can't say. It's astonishing what lots of things, which one can't ever remember particularly hearing, *are* known to one.'

At this point a fellow, seated like a tailor on the drum of the fore-castle-capstan, began to scrape a fiddle, and I crossed the deck to see if the steward had finished serving out the grog to the men.'

It was not yet quite dark, but the twilight obscured the schooner, and the horizon of the sea was a dark, dream-like shadow ; but the night was very calm and lovely, with a new moon in the west that cast a faint trickle of silver upon the sea, and a heaven overhead and in the east crowded with stars, and meteors which glided like illuminated bombshells through the air, and vanished in little puffs of bright smoke.

However, the mystery and beauty of this 'visible darkness' were speedily put to flight by the men lighting the lanterns, and presently the deck was all aglow with the radiance of three-score candles, and it was a pretty sight to see the light flickering upon the small-arms in the racks, and in the brass garnishings of the pumps, and giving a yellow colour to the shrouds for about the height of a man above the bulwarks. This dance by lantern-light was a very unusual departure from the customary order of sailors' festivities, which are nearly always celebrated in the dog-watches; but the novelty of it gave it nearly all its relish. The two fiddlers proved very tolerable scrapers, and made the air resonant with their miaulings; one sat, as I have said, on the forecastle-capstan, and the other atop of the galley; they played the same airs, kept good time, soon worked themselves into a fever of excitement, and their elbows quivered like the reflection of a stationary fish under a running stream, while the crew hopped and sprang about in all directions in couples, making the deck boom

under their shuffling and toeing and scraping, laughing uproariously the while.

One really good dance was a hornpipe performed by four men, who had rigged themselves out in regular theatrical-Jack fashion—flowing breeches, open breasts, jackets rounding over their quarters like the foot of a tautly-set topsail, hats on nine hairs, as they say, and shoes with heels which they rattled like castanets. Their messmates knew their *jigging* qualities, and stopped their own dancing to gather in a crowd, leaving an opening so that we quarter-deck people might see. The capstan fiddler scrambled alongside his brother-scraper on the galley, that the music might be concentrated; but finding the four men waiting and all hands looking aft, I suspected the reason of the delay, and went below to tell Shelvocke that the crew wanted him to witness the hornpipe. He came on deck at once, and drew close to the crowd, who raised a cheer when they saw him that immediately started the fiddlers, and in a moment the four sailors were quivering about in a fashion that set me shouting out of

as breathless as a lake as far as the eye could pierce—formed a beautiful and impressive picture.

This harmless revelry lasted until half-past nine ; and then tired and hot, but all in as high good-humour as if they had been spending a merry time at Greenwich fair with their Sukeys and Polls, the sailors one by one drew away to their hammocks or for a quiet smoke, the fiddlers came down from the top of the galley, the lanterns were extinguished, and by ten o'clock the schooner lay wrapped in silence and darkness, with nothing moving aboard of her but the figures of the look-out men or the shadow of the great main-boom, as the occasional roll of the vessel swayed the ponderous spar athwart the luminous haze around the skylight.

It was my watch on deck, and, missing Shelvocke, I supposed he had turned in ; and so I paced to and fro with Tapping, who, despite the pugnacious mould in which nature had cast his figure and face, was an exceedingly good-tempered and agreeable fellow, and, so far as I had opportunities of judging,

an intelligent seaman and full of sterling pluck. Young as he was, he had seen some strange things in his time—but what sailor had not in that age of adventure and fighting?—and was interesting me with an account of a mutiny which, by the way, he was relating with real dramatic power, when he suddenly broke off, and went to the gangway, and, on looking around, I perceived the glowing tip of a cigar near the figure of the man at the tiller.

‘The cabin is like a bake-house!’ exclaimed Shelvocke, whom I had approached on seeing. ‘How the deuce Chestree can sleep, I don’t know; but that he *is* sleeping you can hear.’

And certainly a most horrible sound of snoring came up through the skylight. The fellow who was steering smothered a laugh.

‘It’s like a church organ with something wrong in its inside,’ I said, almost awed by a snore that could pierce through a stout bulk-head and be audible so far aft as where we stood.

‘This won’t do, Madison,’ said Shelvocke, looking around him at the darkly pure space of water that was only determinable from the sky by the long tremulous white flakes of light which the stars shed upon it. ‘If this calm lasts we shall have to give up our Brest scheme.’

‘I hope not, captain. It’s about time to do something again. There was a heap of luck in the first few hours of our cruise, and if, as the French say, it’s only the first step that costs, the rest of our work ought not to make us grumblers.’

He quitted the spot where we had been standing, probably not wishing the man at the helm to hear us, and we leisurely patrolled the deck. Hearing Chestree snore as we passed the skylight somehow brought young Peacock into my head, probably because the lad was in the second officer’s watch.

‘What a very strange youth our fourth mate is, sir,’ said I.

‘Young Philip Peacock, do you mean?’ he answered quickly. ‘In what way strange? What has he been doing?’

‘Why, nothing, sir ; I judge him by his talk—though, to be sure, he gave me little enough of that to go by. I happened to say that a man can never do better than stick to the religion his mother believed in, and he whipped out against the Roman Catholic faith so passionately, with so much fire in his eyes, that I was honestly surprised.’

Shelvocke remained silent.

‘It seems queer that a young fellow like him, who has spent all his life at sea, should have shore-going prejudices of that kind. I suppose you know his history, sir ?’

He still kept silence.

‘I asked Chestree, who was shipmate with him in an Indiaman,’ continued I, ‘who he was, and he told me that all he knew was that Peacock was a love-child.’

‘Chestree knows that, does he ?’ said Shelvocke coldly, after two or three hard pulls at his cigar. ‘Has he spoken to Peacock about it ?’

‘No, sir, nor is it likely he would.’

‘He had better not. Be good enough,

Madison, to tell him from me he *had better not.*'

'Chestree has too good a heart to stand in need of such an injunction, sir; but of course I will tell him, since it is your order.'

'How comes a circumstance that concerns no living creature but Mr. Peacock to be known to a man like Chestree?' exclaimed Shelvocke in a tone of deep annoyance that he strove ineffectually to disguise. 'Nevertheless,' added he, softening his voice, 'it is true enough, Mr. Madison, though the boy is a fool to allow his sensitiveness to challenge curiosity, as he appears to have done in your case. Of course I do not suppose there is the least unworthiness in the interest Peacock appears to have excited in you.'

'I should be sorry if you thought there was, sir. I have all along been attracted by the lad's beauty and refined manners, but I never should have dreamt of inquiring about him, had not his sudden burst of temper on a subject that one would have supposed a young sailor like him would not trouble his brains about, induced me to speak to Chestree.'

However, I shall be glad of your permission to change the subject.'

'Nay,' answered he, with some of his old good-nature in his voice, 'as he excites your interest there can be no harm in my telling you what I know of his story. His mother was an Italian, and a remarkably beautiful woman. An Englishman, who was staying at Cantanzaro, where she lived with her mother, fell in love with her, and they secretly betrothed themselves. The priests got hold of the mother, and they went to work to separate the girl from a heathen who did not attend mass ; but their efforts, of course, only served to deepen the girl's affection for the man, and so they had him poniarded—but, *malheureusement* pour mademoiselle, not killed. He was in bed a month, and his nurse was his sweetheart, who left her mother's home to be with him. Our true Briton requited the girl's adoration by ruining her. He promised her marriage, but suspecting, I suppose, that he could get on very well without marriage, he never kept his promise. There is a romantic story of

the girl wasting away and breaking her heart over our faithless hero, and dying amid the fogs of London, whither the Englishman had carried her. More likely she died of bronchitis, or lung-inflammation; but those are not diseases to adorn a tale with. At all events, she died—but not having your curiosity, or, to put it more humanely, not finding the lad so fascinating as he appears to be to you, though I took great interest in him when he was brought to me to be apprenticed to a maritime friend of mine, I asked very few questions.'

It was my turn now to be silent.

'So there!' he exclaimed, with a rather unpleasant laugh, 'you have as much of Peacock's story as I can give you. But what on earth there can be about a youth like that to excite the curiosity of an old stager like you, you must really forgive me for not being able to see. However, you can guess now why the boy bounced out about the Roman Catholic religion.'

'Because the priests had a hand in the stabbing of his father, I suppose.'

‘*No !*’ he answered, with impetuous emphasis ; ‘because he hates his mother’s memory and everything belonging to her—like all natural children.’

‘Like all unnatural children, I should say, captain.’

‘It is no business of mine nor of any other person’s,’ he replied, throwing the end of his cigar overboard ; ‘and so you will oblige me by requesting Mr. Chestree not to talk about Mr. Peacock. The boy is under my care, and I’ll not have him pained.’

Tired of the subject and regretting my folly for having started it, I went to the side to look into the north, where a haze was gathering, and felt a little draught of air upon my hot face. It filled the lighter canvas, and a shower of dew fell from the cloths. It died away, but a few minutes after, a stronger breeze frosted the sea with broken starlight, the sails grew steady, and the ear was refreshed by the bubbling of rippling water along the sides of the schooner. I called to the watch to trim sail, and by the time this was done the schooner’s masts were sloping

to a pleasant wind, and a line of froth was whitening the black surface of the sea astern. Before eight bells were struck it had breezed up into a fresh wind with clouds sailing across the stars; and when I left the deck, the *Tigress* was smoking along the quick, short surges with a single reef in her mainsail and foresail, and the decks forward black with the flying spray.

At daybreak, however, as the deuce would have it, the wind dropped again into mere light currents of air, and a hot and dazzling morning threatened to dry up the small breeze that remained, and leave us roasting on a surface of glass.

This was extremely disappointing, for putting aside our chance of fetching Brest in time to catch the skirts of the outward-bound convoy, this stagnant weather was holding everything that swam upon the surface of the sea idle. Whilst the water-line was as polished as the edge of a worn shilling, there was nothing to watch for nor to hope for.

The calm, coupled with the heat, made us all surly. Forward the men were grumbling

in their gizzards and whistling through their teeth as they hung over the bows, and we of the after-part of the vessel could scarcely have been more dogged had we passed the night in arguing on religion. Shelvocke was particularly meditative, and sat smoking cigars the whole morning, with a broad-brimmed straw hat over his nose, and his feet on the skylight. He had a book on his knee, though he seldom glanced at it; but from a sheltered spot in the waist where I had hidden myself to smoke a pipe, I noticed that he constantly followed Peacock about with his eyes.

However, by dinner-time our tempers had been improved by a pleasant little wind that hit the schooner's best sailing point, and sent her cheeping through the water with rounded sails and breezy decks. Added to this was the cordialising influence of the wine. Shelvocke shed his scales, and 'stood confest' the blunt and genial sailor nature had made him. Corney was of our party, and favoured us, for the first time, with an astonishingly clever imitation of two Frenchmen quarrelling. We

quitted the table more amiable if not wiser men, and the sight of the waters playing to windward in quick glancings of froth, as though shoals of mackerel leapt from the cool green into the sunshine, sustained our good temper by making us hopeful.

Shortly after we had come on deck, Shelvocke walked up to me, and said in a low but pleasant voice :

‘ I forgot to ask you, Madison, if you spoke to Chestree about Peacock, as I requested.’

‘ I did, sir, last night.’

‘ All right,’ he answered, and went away ; much to my relief, as I was afraid he would pursue the subject.

Half-past three had just been struck on the silver-clear bell we carried on the main-deck. I was standing on a gun-carriage looking over the side at the passing water. The soft creaming of the foam, as it raced past with its outer edge sparkling blue and green and yellow in the sunshine, like diamonds strown upon snow, and beautifully defined by the luminous emerald hue of the water beyond, mingled with the tinkling of large bubbles as

they exploded, and the cool plashing of the polished arch of water curling from the stem, fell with a delicious refreshment upon the senses; and the rich warm wind pouring out of the mainsail swept past the ear with a mixture of vibratory sounds which seemed like the notes of a far-off band of music.

Whenever the schooner had way on her, it was always our custom to have a hand stationed aloft on one of the fore-yards. This look-out startled me from a deep reverie I had fallen into by hailing the deck.

‘Hallo!’ I exclaimed.

‘A sail on the port bow, sir!’ he sang out.

‘Can you make out which way she is standing?’

He shaded his eyes and had a long look, and answered that he believed she was heading our way.

‘You had better take the glass aloft, Mr. Madison,’ said Shelvocke.

I did as I was ordered, and presently found myself alongside the look-out on the top-gallant-yard. The sail was perfectly visible

from this great elevation, and on examining her through the glass, I made her out to be a large three-masted lugger, but her hull was still below the horizon. I called out to Shelvocke to let him know what her rig was, and added that I would stay aloft until I could command a better view of her.

‘She should be a lumping boat, to judge by the size of her mainsail,’ said I to the man at my side—a fellow of the name of Wilkin-son, one of the smartest men in my watch, so tanned by long exposure to the sun that his face looked as if it had been painted with iodine, and who sat on the yard (the sail of which was furled) with his legs dangling down before it, and his hands buried in his breeches-pockets, and taking his ease on this eminence of a hundred and thirty feet above the sea-level as coolly as a landsman in an arm-chair. ‘But she has only her mainsail set. I can’t make out what she would be at. ‘She looks to be hove right up in the wind’s eye.’

‘She’ll crack on sail when she sees us, sir—leastways if she is a Frenchman,’ said the

man, politely covering the weather side of his mouth with his hand while he discharged some tobacco-juice into the air.

I jammed the glass into the bunt of the top-gallant sail, and threw my leg over the yard to make me a comfortable posture with my back against the mast.

I have often wondered, in reading that magnificent description of a giddy height of cliff in 'King Lear,' how the great master would have described a view from the mast-head of a lofty vessel. Say what you will of a survey from a mountain-top or from the edge of towering cliffs; in my humble judgment the most thrilling impression that great elevations can produce is (leaving of course the balloon-car out of the question) to be obtained from the slender yard of a tall ship in the middle of the sea.

For here you get an element of *isolation* that, in spite of the lonesomeness of craggy land, is qualified, if not extinguished, when surveying a scene from any sort of height ashore, not only by the sight of land all around you, but by land being under your

feet. But at the mast-head of a ship you stand upon a slender rope or bestride a spar that looks no stouter than a knitting-needle from the deck, and you gaze around upon a mighty surface of water ; for the narrow and familiar horizon beheld from the deck is magnified into an immense ocean, and a whole hemisphere of heaven leans away into the prodigious distance, while below is the narrow shape of the hull on whose surface the seamen crawl in size no bigger than flies, and you are amazed that so slender and tapering a fabric should support the sky-searching height of mast and canvas from the summit of which you look down. *Here*, I say, a man gets that sense of isolation which no land-eminence can yield, and it is complete enough even when the seas bask brightly and calmly around, when the sails are gently drawing, when the sweet wind blows softly, and the blue sky looks blandly upon the deep in whose bosom it pictures its azure beauty. But it is *supreme* when the tempest is around you, when the heavens are full of sooty clouds, whirling in convolutions like

the smoke of a newly-fed furnace crowding in black, fat volumes from a factory chimney ; when the torn sea spreads like a vast surface of wool for leagues and leagues, and the huge surges plash in sheets of blinding spray over the streak of hull that races, far beneath you, like a shadow through the white haze of storm-driven spume, and reels under the shocks with a quivering that sets the mast on which you are poised trembling like an old man's hand ; when the gale is roaring in thunder out of the strip of sail stretched upon the yards a long distance below you, and the din of clashing seas, and the yelling of the tempest in the sky perfect through the ear the scene of grandeur and terror beheld by the eye.

‘Top-gallant-yard, there ! Mr. Madison, are we rising the sail ahead ?’

‘Yes, sir, fast ; she's a very large lugger ; apparently not far short of our tonnage,’ I answered, bringing the glass to bear upon the hull that was now hove up clear upon the smooth water-line. ‘She looks to me to be deserted,’ I said to Wilkinson. ‘Watch her

a bit, and you will see how she comes to and falls off ;' and handing him the glass, I hailed the deck and told Shelvocke to luff the schooner a point, as the lugger was for forging ahead, and would be to windward of us.

'She certainly don't look to me as if there was anybody at her helm,' exclaimed Wilkinson. 'But there ain't much doubt as to her character, sir ; she's a large French privateer chokeful of men, I dessay, though it's surprisin' they don't appear to see us coming, and wake up.'

I descended the rigging, and on making my report to Shelvocke the order was given to see all clear. The great main-sail and spars of the lugger were by this time visible from the deck, and after working with the glass for some moments Shelvocke turned to me with a puzzled expression.

'Really, by the look of her, Mr. Madison, I am disposed to agree with you that she is abandoned,' said he. 'She is neither hove to nor ratching. One might suppose she would have made us out long before this—yet I can-
imagine there is any trick meant.'

‘I should say not, sir. She was in the same posture when we first sighted her.’

Meanwhile the *Tigress* was slipping through the water quietly but very nimbly, and as the lugger lay athwart our hawse, apparently shooting a few fathoms to windward as her main-sail filled and then curving round into the wind again and lying motionless, it was like running down to a stationary object, and in less than twenty minutes her hull was distinctly visible from the deck.

‘Seven guns of a side, by Jupiter!’ exclaimed Shelvocke. ‘But I see no men.’

‘Unless they are all at quarters on their hams under the bulwarks, sir. You remember how the picaroon was caught by the troop-ship who kept her soldiers hidden until the privateer ranged alongside, and then discharged a broadside of three hundred muskets and six rounds of grape into the thick of the buccaneering crew?’

‘Ay, we must mind what we are about,’ he replied, glancing along our decks at the men grouped at the guns, and at the crows, handspikes, rammers, sponges, powder-horns, and

train-tackles which garnished the sides of the grim black pieces. We watched the lugger with keen intentness, expecting every moment to see some movement aboard of her. There could be no doubt that she was a Frenchman. I thought it possible that her people might have mistaken us for a consort for whom they were waiting ; but though we were near enough to her now to have her very clearly in the glass, nothing living could be perceived. I watched her bulwarks with the closest attention to see if anything moved, but she looked as dead as a water-logged hulk. She was a very large and handsome vessel, coppered to the bends, painted black, and heavily sparred. She seemed to chafe like a tethered race-horse as she filled and shook her cotton-white canvas, and, like a creature of instinct, appeared to know her danger, and to make short and ineffectual efforts to escape.

‘Do you notice that she has her tompions in, sir?’ I exclaimed ; ‘that does not look as if she meant to receive us ungraciously.’

‘She is evidently deserted,’ answered

Shelvocke. 'Get the launch and the two cutters piped away, Mr. Madison. But mind how you board. I have known a tempting gangway rope explode a pistol in the magazine, and blow a ship and the boats alongside her into staves.'

We held on with the boats towing, until we were within half a mile of the lugger; a number of men heavily armed then tumbled into the launch, of which I took command, and we shoved off, followed by the other boats, each of which contained ten men.

As we advanced I watched the lugger keenly. This was not an ordinary boating expedition. When you are prepared for resistance your nerves are braced up, you can pretty well guess what is going to happen; with a crew of Englishmen at your back you foresee the spring of the men on to the sides, the slashing at the nettings, the ugly thrusts of the boarding-pikes, the clash of cutlasses, the fierce growling and wild shrieks of the deadly scuffle, the deafening explosion of small arms at your ears, the murderous crash of tomahawks. But here was a powerful

vessel wrapped in the silence of death. Her bulwarks hid the decks, and it was impossible to tell what lurked under the tall shelter. A shower of grape would have been a welcome relief to the highly-wrought feeling of expectation inspired by the grim and silent lugger. Our men, who would have looked five times their own number unflinchingly in the face, seemed almost scared by the unusual sight of a long and heavily-armed craft, seemingly abandoned, and suspecting some hellish design to underlie this spectacle of helplessness and desertion, were continually glancing over their shoulders at the vessel, as they rowed.

We had approached within a musket-shot of her, when I saw a human head rise above the bulwarks and remain for a few seconds gazing at us, during which it swayed to and fro like the ball of a pendulum. It disappeared, and immediately after a man with his hair over his eyes, and with his clothes in wild disorder, scrambled on to the rail, fired a pistol at us and, with a laugh like a madman's, flung the weapon towards my boat and vanished, falling backwards in such a manner

that the last we saw of him was his quivering legs. At this extraordinary sight Tapping, who was in charge of the cutter immediately astern of me, burst into a hoarse guffaw, like the bray of an ass.

‘A strong pull, men!’ I shouted. ‘There *are* people to receive us. Board her astern, cutters!’ I cried, turning to address the hinder boats; ‘her bows are my chance.’

We dashed alongside simultaneously, scrambled over her bulwarks like a cloud of blue-bottles swarming on a piece of carrion, and in a trice had possession of her decks.

As strange and monstrous a scene as ever human eye encountered presented itself. So far as I could judge by hurriedly running my glance over them, there lay upon the decks about ten or eleven men in the last stage of beastly intoxication. Some reclined like logs upon their backs, with the full light of the sun pouring upon their crimson faces, their mouths open, snorting stertorously like persons in an apoplexy, and the glazed whites of their eyes looking like slips of blank paper between their half-closed lids. Others nearly

as helpless, and quite as embroiled as these, but still preserving some dim glimmering of human reason as one might suppose, faintly struggled to rear their bodies on their elbows, but fell back with horrid smiles and a sputtering of inarticulate words. There was only one man—he who had fired at us—who appeared equal to the task of gaining his feet. He rose from the side of the carronade slide where he had fallen, and seizing a boarding-pike, gave a drunken shout, and reeled towards us with the weapon couched in the posture of charging; one of our men sprang forward, but before he could grapple him the brute tripped over a coil of rope, and fell with such a mighty whack of his forehead upon the deck that I was quite sure, even if he had not killed himself outright, he would give us no further trouble.

Against the coamings of the main-hatch, that was covered with a tarpaulin over it, was a tub half-full of undiluted rum. The mere sniffing up of the ardent spirit with the fierce rays of the afternoon sun beating upon my head and back made my brain dizzy. A

couple of tin vessels were sunk in the tub, and half-a-dozen utensils of a similar kind lay scattered among the prostrate men.

Of all beastly pictures—I hope to be forgiven the violent word—these intoxicated sailors made one of the worst—I had almost written *the* worst—that ever shocked and pained and disgusted human eyes. Some of them had evidently been concerned in a scuffle, for their clothes were in rags, and they lay half-naked. One dreadful-looking creature, with red hair in a tangled mass over his forehead, and the whites of his eyes giving an extraordinary character of horror to his purple face, his gibbering, bluish-coloured lips churning out a stream of froth that flowed down his chin, one hand under his back, and the other across his breast with the fingers working convulsively, like the antennæ of a dying ‘long-legs,’ and his legs doubled under him as though the bones of them had been taken out, and his bare breast and a portion of his shirt stained with a quantity of rum that appeared to have been flung over him, was a sight that even the

horror-loving eye of Hogarth would have shunned, and alongside of which Caliban would have looked a fair and pleasant creation.

‘I believe there are more of them below, sir,’ rattled out Tapping, slewing his head about over a small closed skylight in his efforts to see through the panes which the flashing of the sun converted into a looking-glass.

‘Mr. Chestree, capsize that tub of rum,’ I exclaimed. ‘Man the pumps, some of you, and drench these beasts—there are buckets forward there ; mind you don’t drown them.’

Whilst this was doing I threw open the skylight, first taking care to group a number of men with loaded pistols around it ready to fire down should any show of resistance be made by the inmates of the cabin. The skylight was pitched right amidships of the cabin ceiling, and on putting my head down, I saw five figures in various postures upon the floor, all motionless, and as dead drunk as the men on deck ; one of them lying capsized backwards in his chair, his head on the floor, and

his heels on the table. A perfect stench of rum came up in a cloud ; it was like holding one's nose over a distiller's vat.

I was in the act of descending the companion-steps, when I was loudly hailed by Chestree, who stood forward.

‘ Mr. Madison, will you step this way, sir ? I believe there's a whole cargo of men under the fore-hatch here.’

I immediately ran towards the fore-castle.

‘ Listen, sir !’ exclaimed Chestree ; and standing close to the small covered hatch, that was situated a few paces abaft the fore-mast, I heard a noise of knocking accompanied by sounds which resembled the distant moaning of a number of wounded animals.

‘ Belay that pumping !’ I called out to the men, who were dashing water over the senseless bodies with a glee that betokened high enjoyment of the work. ‘ Six of you keep watch round the companion, and the rest come forward. Look to your small arms, men ; there seems a whole ship-load of human beings under these decks.’

They immediately flung down their buckets,

and formed into a compact square round the fore-hatch, the cover of which I now ordered them to lift.

Scarcely had this been done, when there arose a wild and frightful din of agonised voices. May God spare me from ever hearing the like again! A rush of hot, fetid, suffocating air followed the opening of the hatch, and made every man who had bent forward to look down recoil.

‘My God!’ shouted Chestree, ‘they are French prisoners, Mr. Madison! Look! there are a dozen suffocated bodies under the feet of the living!’

He raised his voice into a shriek, and a deep groan broke from the seamen who stood around.

The cabin or fore-castle was about six feet deep; the ladder had been drawn up, and when I looked down into this black and suffocating pit I beheld a whole surface of upward-gazing faces, glimmering yellow amid the twilight, with dark prostrate forms beneath them, while yell upon yell burst from the lips of the miserable sufferers. ‘*De l’eau! de l’eau!*’

de l'eau! this was the one burden of the dreadful raving.

‘Silence!’ I shouted in my bad French, that was made worse still, just as my voice was rendered hoarse as a raven’s, by the agitation and horror I was under. ‘We are here to succour you. Tell me your numbers.’

‘We were forty. There rests but twenty-five living,’ came the answer.

‘Quick, men!’ I shouted to my own brave fellows; ‘hand up these poor creatures. Lean over as many of you as can find room, and let them catch your hands. They’ll scramble up well enough with that help.’

Half-a-dozen of the strongest men flung down their weapons and dropped on their knees, and as one by one the prisoners were drawn up, they fled to the scuttle-butt and fought for the dipper like famished dogs over a bone.

They had all the same semi-asphyxiated look, distended eye-balls, whitish lips, and the veins standing out like whipcord upon their throats and temples; whilst the perspiration had drenched the very coats on their

backs, and so slimy were their hands that our men had to catch them by the wrists to get a fair hoisting purchase.

Hardly had the first-comers on deck assuaged their thirst, when they turned upon the bodies of the drunken seamen, whose nationality I had not yet been able to determine, though I was very much afraid that they were Englishmen. They brandished their fists over them, howled at and cursed them, and spat upon them, and were only restrained from tearing the inanimate brutes to pieces by a determined movement aft on the part of the men. One of the prisoners pulled a long knife from his breeches-pocket and made a sneaking stride towards the red-haired monster whose appearance I have described, grasping the haft of the knife so that the blade forked out of his shaking hand astern ; and by the look of his face he would, I believe, have stabbed the intoxicated sailor to the heart before I could have had time to rush upon him, had not one of his companions gripped his arm and muttered fiercely in his ear, and dragged him violently back.

On the other hand, there were some among these wretched captives who, after they had drank and recovered their minds, appeared overcome with the horrors from which they had been released. I saw three of them weeping like children, others hiding their faces in their hands, and two on their knees crossing themselves and praying. I glanced my eye over them as they stood near the scuttle-butts in a group of twenty-five—the number they had named, though how they had been able to take stock in the black and stifling fore-castle was and still remains a great mystery to me—and noticed that they were all seamen, dressed in the picturesque costumes of the French buccaneers of that period, most of them with coloured caps, the points of which fell over their ears, and red shirts, and duck or fine canvas breeches, and short sea-boots with overhanging flaps. They were in general small men (though there were three or four strapping fellows among them), with keen, dark, savage, bearded faces, and many of them wore large earrings and silver rings on

their fingers. They were unarmed, it is true : but there were pikes, cutlasses, and pistols in abundance both upon the decks and in the racks, and these men, naturally ferocious, had been converted into wild beasts by the shocking treatment they had received.

To deprive the demons in them of any chance of an outbreak, I divided them into four gangs, each one of which was guarded by a number of my own men, and ordered Chestree to hail the schooner and request Captain Shelvocke to send the pinnace to me along with Mr. Corney.

The *Tigress* had ratched some way to windward of us under her foresail only, but on perceiving the signals made by Chestree, Shelvocke at once put his helm up, and ran down. Whilst the schooner was approaching, I called to a couple of seamen and entered the lugger's cabin. I found myself in a tolerably roomy box-shaped place, pierced by the foot of the mizzen-mast, with a couple of berths aft, the doors of which were open. There was a row of shelves affixed to the foremast-bulkhead, full of china plates, glasses,

and things of that kind, and the ceiling was garnished with a number of muskets, cutlasses, and a weapon I had never before seen—a truncheon of the length of a man's arm, terminating in a knob of *spiked iron* of about the dimensions and weight of a four-pound round-shot. There were three or four overturned chairs upon the floor, a quantity of broken glass that crunched under every step I and my men took, and the planks were slippery with rum, the smell of which was quite intolerable in the close and muggy atmosphere ; and the sides of the table, which were rimmed to the height of an inch to prevent the crockery from sliding in rough weather, were afloat with grog, like the scuppers of a ship in a gale of wind, that drained off first at one end and then at the other, as the vessel swayed.

I now observed that there were six men in this cabin, the man that had escaped the glance I had taken through the skylight being jammed up in a corner, where he sat upon his haunches, with his arms hanging all abroad and his head fallen over his knees.

man who has been killed by a pike-thrust, the most terrible that I know of is that of death by asphyxia—at all events when that kind of death is produced by the slow operation that killed these most miserable creatures. All the horror and anguish of the slow approach of extinction, the agony of the difficult breathing, the dreadful despair following the mad and unavailing fight for life in darkness and in the midst of a steamy and putrescent atmosphere, were expressed in these men's half-closed eyes and parted blue lips, from which a reddish froth was oozing, and in the greenish-yellow of the puffy skin, and in their blackened finger-nails buried in the palms of their hands.

On Corney's arrival, he immediately fell to an examination of these bodies, one by one. The Frenchmen watched him intently and in profound silence at first ; but as he passed from one corpse to the other, shaking his head, half-smothered execrations broke from the prisoners ; and when Corney had inspected the last body, and glanced around at me with a look on his face that was unmistakable,

a wild chorus of yells and curses broke from the Frenchmen ; they all cried out together, and the sound of their voices was as much like the snarling of wild beasts as the imagination could conceive : there was a short rush from one group towards some of the intoxicated men, and a few hard blows were exchanged between them and the *Tigresses* ; one of the prisoners was knocked down, and a pistol exploded in the scuffle. However, the poor devils stood but a small chance with eight and thirty determined Englishmen armed to the teeth. I ordered ten of them into the pinnace, and the remainder I mustered aft, where they were suffered to remain with a strong guard over them, whilst I dealt with the drunken scoundrels who littered the decks and the cabin.

Though I have dwelt at some length on the particulars of this strange and ghastly adventure, yet not more than a quarter of an hour had been expended from the moment of our boarding to the time when I sent away half of the prisoners. Some of the drunken men were now beginning to show signs of

life ; one or two of them struggled until they gained their feet, but immediately fell down again, and lay looking at us out of their bloodshot eyes and with sickly imbecile smiles. Some made an effort to crawl on their bellies to the carronade slides or the foot of the masts, out of the sun, where they sat up with their backs propped by the spar, in which posture they watched us with lolling heads, and their hands lying lifeless upon the decks, and their legs twisted into all manner of drunken shapes under or around them.

I told Chestree to take some of our seamen below, and bring the men who were in the cabin on deck.

‘Bundle the brutes up as they come,’ said I ; ‘and Mr. Tapping, get the pumps manned and give some of those breathing logs there another drenching.’ And while these orders were being obeyed, I called to Corney and requested his help to question the Frenchmen, whose story I was anxious to hear.

Although, as I have said, I pronounced the French language very ill, I was well

enough acquainted with that tongue to understand it fully when spoken by others. I had, therefore, no difficulty in following the short and simple story that was related to Corney by one of the prisoners, whom I suspected to be a mate by the way in which he acted as spokesman for the others and the respect that was suggested by their manner towards him, though there was nothing to distinguish him in his dress from the rest of his shipmates.

He said that the lugger was named the *Droit Maritime*, and that her crew, when she left Granville that day a fortnight previously, had consisted of a hundred and sixty men. Of these, sixty were away in prizes when the lugger fell in with, and engaged, a large English polacre brig, who, after killing and wounding forty of the Frenchman's crew, hauled down her colours. Of the Englishman's crew only fourteen or fifteen remained unhurt, and these were put aboard the lugger, who sent ten of her own men into the brig to carry her to the Tregnier Roads. But a few hours after this engagement a small vessel hove in

sight, which the French captain determined to pursue; he chased her to the northward for thirteen hours, but losing sight of her in the darkness, bore up again to follow in the wake of the captured brig.

This brought the time down to two o'clock on the morning of the day in which the adventure I am relating befell us; at which hour, a number of the Frenchmen being in the fore-castle of the lugger, the English prisoners managed to break out through the main-hatch, under which they had been confined in the airiest and roomiest part of the vessel. The attack was so sudden that the people on deck, being utterly unprepared, were immediately overpowered, and flung overboard, 'alive as they stood!' said the man who told the story, and his face grew dark with passion as he added that the hatch was put over the men who were sleeping in the fore-castle, and that in that hole, without light, without air, without water, forty human beings had been confined for *fourteen* hours, while the ruffians who had become, not their gaolers, but their murderers, had broken open

the spirit-room, and drank until they had reduced themselves to the condition in which we found them.

‘And they are our countrymen!’ I exclaimed in French, looking with horror and shame at the brutes, whose contortions were reptile-like as they endeavoured to roll away from the buckets of water which the *Tigresses* were sluicing over them, and snapped their teeth and gibbered in their drunken passion.

‘Yes, they are English,’ answered the Frenchman, ‘but not such English as I have been used to meet,’ he added, with more tact than I should have expected to find in such a scowling, black and savage-looking creature; and then with a world of moving passion in his voice, and with wild and pleading gesticulations, which amazingly increased the pity his dreadful tale provoked, he poured forth in rich dramatic accents an account of the terrible sufferings they had endured; how some of them had sucked the blood from their own arms to quench their raging thirst; how one by one fifteen of them had sunk down, dropping without a moan, until the living had no

space for their feet, and were forced to stand upon the soft and soaking bodies of the dead. He described them tearing the very nails off their fingers in their efforts to force the hatch, so as to obtain, not liberty, but one little draught of pure air ; the horrible sound of the grinding of teeth, the choked and husky hum of voices, the deadly struggle to keep or obtain a place under the hatch, where a tiny crevice showed a faint gleam of daylight.

I remembered the heat of the weather—the heat that had rendered the well-ventilated cabin of the *Tigress* almost unbearable—whilst he was speaking !

They could hear, he said, the Englishmen singing on deck and afterwards fighting, until the silence assured them that the wretches had drunk themselves senseless, on which they abandoned all hope, for they knew that every miserable inmate of the black and choking forecastle would be dead before the Englishmen recovered their minds.

‘I do honestly believe, sir,’ exclaimed Corney, drawing a long quivering breath as the man ended, and turning to me with a face

as white as a ghost, 'that this is the most horrible thing that has happened in my time, and I am forty-one this month.'

At this moment I was hailed by Shelvocke, who had ranged the schooner within a musket-shot of the lugger.

'What are you doing now, Mr. Madison?'

'There's a whole mob of drunken Englishmen aboard of us here, sir,' I answered; 'and we are fishing the last of the tribe out of the cabin. These scoundrels will want watching as well as the Frenchmen, and I think you had better allow forty of our men to remain in the lugger.'

'Very well,' he replied. 'Dispose of the men as you think best. How many of our seamen have you aboard now?'

'Thirty-eight, sir.'

'I will send a couple more in the pinnace, and she can bring the other boats back with her. Let Mr. Tapping and Mr. Chestree return with them, and you can remain as prize-master. Get sail made as soon as possible, for I want to be off.'

'Ay, ay, sir.'

The disgust that had been excited in our men by the drunkenness as well as the brutality of the English seamen, was amusingly exhibited in their handling of the fellows whom they hauled out of the cabin. They dragged them up the companion-steps heels foremost, some of them, and rolled them along the decks like casks with their feet, and it was almost impossible to keep one's gravity over the postures the drunken fellows threw themselves into, and the imbecile expression of their faces as they were bundled unceremoniously over the hatch and dropped, one on top of the other, into the gloomy hole from which we had liberated their captives; but, more merciful than they, we left the hatch open, and this made all the difference between a black and noisome grave and an ordinary forecabin.

The Frenchmen were now got under hatches and stowed amidships of the lugger, where there was plenty of room and light, and sentries posted at each hatchway; and as nothing remained to be done but to bury the dead, I despatched a number of men to get as many hammocks on deck as there were

corpses, whilst the rest made sail on the lugger.

By this time the sun was low upon the sea, but there was the promise of a beautiful evening and a fine night in the soft blue of the sky, and in the high shreds of white vapour which mottled the heavens in the east, and there was a cool wind blowing. The sixteen dead bodies—fifteen Frenchmen and one Englishman—made a most repulsive and ghastly spectacle of the deck, and I ordered them to be thrown overboard as fast as the men could lace them up in the hammocks, taking care, however, that some show of reverence attended these precipitate burials. I felt easier in my mind when the last body was gone, and when I could look along the wide deck that sloped upwards like a smack's towards the bows, and witness only the familiar sight of the rows of guns, and the seamen at work, and the sentries standing with drawn cutlasses and loaded pistols in their belts by the open hatches. Sailors are superstitious about the dead, and are always uneasy while they are shipmates with a corpse.

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Besides, fifteen of the unhappy creatures had died so horrible a death, that the mere thought of their last sufferings turned the heart sick ; and the depression of spirits the sight of them bred in us was as reasonable an excuse as we needed to give them an informal and hurried toss.

Next to a schooner, I think a lugger the usefulest if not the handiest rig afloat. I had never sailed one before, and now I was in charge of a lugger of above two hundred tons, built and owned at St. Mâlo, and as fast and powerful a boat as any that ever hailed from that nest of privateers. Whatever injury she had received from the guns of the polacre had been made good, and when we had mast-headed her enormous gaffs a whole ocean of canvas looked to be spread overhead.

Shelvocke sung out that he wanted to try the schooner against her, but fast as the lugger unquestionably was, giving one a sensation of skimming rather than sailing, she was no match for the schooner, who walked away from her as though she had her tow-rope aboard, and had no difficulty in

keeping her position abreast of us under her main-sail and jib only. And how glorious *she* looked! glancing her copper along the dark green water with the red sunset levelling its warm rich light at her over our mast-heads and rosily tinting her graceful sails and streaking her bright masts with lines of fire, and giving a reddish tinge to the froth that rolled along her black side like a line of wool unwinding from her bows; whilst her bristling guns and high and gleaming bulwarks, and the massive though beautiful sheer of her from the gangway to the cathead, gave one such an idea of the formidable figure she must make in the eyes of an enemy as I had never before realised.

When we were fairly sailing along with the decks washed down, and the ropes coiled away, and the guns carefully looked to, in the event of a sudden call to arms, and while the crisp slice of moon was doing battle with the reddish twilight in which the figures of the men, as they hung with pipes in their mouths over the bows of the lugger, loomed large; and the sentries round the hatches were like statues

seen within a dimly-lighted museum ; and the form of the schooner about quarter of a mile away on the weather-bow might, at the first glance, have passed for an optical illusion, and set one winking to look again, so vague and airy was the shape of her on the running water, and so spectral the pallid canvas that seemed in the act of melting away on the indigo of the eastern sky ; methought—for what should all this fine writing preface but a rank bit of commonplace ?—that I would sup. And so down I went into the cabin which, having been cleansed and swabbed, had lost much of its rum-breathing atmosphere, and set a youthful *Tigress* (who counted as one of the forty men) to hunt about for something to eat ; and presently he had furnished out a very comfortable supper-table, on which I beheld an excellent ham, a piece of cold brisket of beef that looked to have been fattened on English grass, some capital sea-biscuits, a cheese, and a bottle of wine—the fruits of a well-stocked larder or pantry which I believe only a boy would have stumbled on, for the door of it was a sliding panel in the foremost

bulkhead, and was as mysterious a closet as anything of the kind I ever read of in the *Anna Maria* and *Rosa Matilda* romances.

I so little relished sitting down to this supper alone, that in casting about me for a companion—Corney unhappily had returned to the schooner with Chestree and Tapping—I thought of the fellow who had acted as spokesman when we questioned the Frenchman, and whom I took to be mate: ‘Come,’ thought I, ‘the poor devil has suffered enough at the hands of Englishmen; I will ask him to sup with me.’

So I went on deck to speak to the Frenchman down the main-hatch, as I knew there was no man aboard who could have delivered any message they would understand.

I called out, ‘Messieurs, I wish to speak to you;’ whereat a whole crowd of them came and stood under the hatchway. There was just twilight enough to enable me to distinguish the faces of the poor creatures, for whom all my pity revived as they stood gazing up at me, and among them I noticed the man I wanted. So, addressing myself to

him, I made shift to let him know that I should be glad if he would join me at supper.

He put his hand on his breast, and made me a bow full of grace, though his dignity was somewhat fluttered by the seamen who guarded the hatch having to hoist him on deck by the arms. Before I went aft I said to him in a voice I wished his companions below to hear, that I was anxious the prisoners should want for nothing it was in my power to give them : and any desire they expressed to the sentries should be attended to, if reasonable. It was my duty, I said, to atone for the inhumanity of the monsters who were imprisoned in the forecastle, and who would be delivered up to justice on our arrival in England. He understood me, for I helped out my meaning by the gestures which make up the better half of the French language, and thanked me very gratefully, and looking down the hatch, exclaimed :

‘ You hear what this *bon monsieur* says ? ’

‘ Yes, yes ; he is a comrade to be proud of—he has a French heart—he is an honest man,’ the poor fellows answered.

‘Here, Parell,’ I called to the boatswain’s mate, who headed my detachment of the *Tigresses*, ‘see that these Frenchmen are well treated. I have told them to make their wants known to the sentries, but of course if you have any doubts you will come to me for instructions. As to the brutes in the fore-castle, if you hear any murmuring among them, tip them a few buckets of salt-water.’

The man grinned and touched his hat, and, followed by the French seaman, who did actually prove to be the mate of the lugger, I led the way to the cabin. I pointed to a seat, but he looked at his hands and down his shirt with a half-apologetic smile.

I nodded, as much as to say ‘I see what you want,’ and motioned towards one of the after-cabins, in which I had already taken care to assure myself the things he required were to be found. I admired his tact in leaving the door wide open whilst he bathed his face and passed a comb through his long black hair. Although dressed only in a shirt and trousers and a red sash round his waist, his brief and meagre toilet appeared to have given him as

much confidence and ease as a new suit of clothes would have done ; there was even a well-bred air in his manner as he stepped out of the berth smiling and lightly humming a tune, with his hands clasped in front of him, and his white teeth gleaming under his jetty mustache, and his black eyes shining.

He insisted on my sitting first, and bowed to me when he took his chair, and with the gayest air in the world told me that yonder berth which I had been good enough to let him enter, had been *his own*.

‘ But, monsieur,’ said he, toying with his glass that I had filled with wine, ‘ the corsair’s toast should be always—*La guerre !* His enemies are his friends, and he is an imbecile who would grumble at the fortune who hates him to-day and caresses him to-morrow.’

He chinked his glass against mine, and emptied it with a fine theatrical flourish. But though I was amused and even pleased with, I was not to be deceived by, this holiday politeness. The wisdom of having a loaded pistol in the side-pocket of the coat I wore had much weight given to it, not alone by

the array of deadly weapons which glittered over the head of my friend within easy reach of his hand, but by the inherent fierceness and rascality in the fellow's face, which his smiles only lighted up, and the peculiar prowling roll of his gleaming eyes whenever he was silent for a few moments.

Indeed he was a complete realisation of the popular idea of the picaroon, privateersman, corsair, pirate, or buccaneer—the world has never stinted the trade in titles—dark as a half-caste, long, black, curling hair, thick eyebrows, which formed an angle the point of which was in the indent betwixt the brow and the nose, long moustaches, the ends of which overhung the short bristling beard, a thick neck and square throat, which suggested the heaviness of the concealed jaws, with the cheap exterior trappings of earrings, finger-rings, and an ebony crucifix, the head of the silver figure on which glittered just above the open shirt on his olive-coloured skin. His manners were mild enough with me, but it was the amiability of a dog whose ears are uncocked because you carry a thick stick, and

who wags his tail while he languishingly eyes your throat.

He ate very heartily, and enjoyed himself after the philosophy of his countrymen. No outsider would have guessed his situation from his manner, nor have supposed him other than one of our men, or at least a passenger. The talking was mostly on his side, for the very good reason that I had not enough of the language to sustain a dialogue, and he did not know a word of English except 'Yash,' which he meant for 'Yes,' and which he repeatedly uttered.

Having supped, I pulled out a pipe and a paper of tobacco, which I offered to him. He thanked me with a laugh, and said that if I would prefer a cigar he would be happy to fetch a box.

'Where are they to be found?' I asked.

He pointed under the table, and on peering at the deck, I observed, close to my feet, a trap-door about four feet square with an iron ring affixed to it.

'There are not only cigars there,' said he, 'but you will find some boxes, the contents

of which would keep the whole of the men in this lugger, and in your schooner too, supplied with cigars, ay, and *grogue* also, monsieur, for a hundred years, were they to live as long.'

I looked at him earnestly.

'Monsieur does not know what his schooner has captured?' said, he, with a bitter smile.

'I should be glad to hear,' I answered.

'What does it matter *now*?' he cried, with a fierce shrug, and apparently thinking aloud. 'But at least *your* crew will have the booty—the 'monsters who would have destroyed us will not share.'

I was not very sure of this, so I made him no reply, merely keeping an interrogative stare fixed upon him.

'About these cigars?' said he. 'Shall I fetch a box?'

'I will not give you that trouble,' I answered. 'Ransom!' I shouted.

The boy who was sitting on the top of the companion-steps ran down.

'Tell Parell to send a couple of men aft, here, with a lighted lantern.'

Although I believed there was no treacherous intent in the Frenchman's offer to procure the cigars, it was assuredly not my business to trust him. The powder-magazine was, in all probability, situated somewhere under our feet ; the ruffianly Englishmen, who had killed fifteen and tortured the rest of this prisoner's shipmates, were still aboard the lugger, and the temptation to blow *them* as well as *us* into fragments might prove stronger than the consideration that he would also be destroying himself and his fellow-captives. Be this as it may, I would not trust him ; but my evasion of his offer did not at all offend him. He merely said, and not satirically either, 'Monsieur is very polite,' meaning that I was polite not to allow him to take the trouble to fetch the cigars.

'Pray,' said I, whilst we waited for the men, 'will you have the goodness to tell me what those cases which you have spoken of contain ?'

'One hundred thousand Mexican dollars,' he answered promptly.

I looked at him amazed ; in truth I believed

the man was joking, and the expression of my face must have said as much, for he immediately added :

‘We found the money in one of the prizes we took this day a week, monsieur. My captain transferred the chests to the *Droit Maritime*, as he believed the silver would be safer in our charge than if left in the custody of the small prize crew whom we sent to France in the captured vessel. One would have thought,’ he exclaimed, with his face darkening under a sudden gust of passion that at least convinced me he was speaking the truth, ‘that the captain of a vessel with such a booty on board would have made haste to land it. Instead, my captain, not content with risking this sum of money in the encounter with the polacre brig, must needs chase a small vessel who carries him within a few leagues of British waters. And for what? The chase escapes us! our prisoners rise, murder my captain and a number of men, and this rich lugger becomes your prey without costing you a struggle! I remonstrated—I cried out against my captain for his madness

in chasing that small vessel. "We are rich enough for this voyage," I exclaimed; "let us at least make for Granville, and start afresh with a swept hold." He threatened me! he called me *boute-feu! mutin!* And now behold us!

He dashed his clenched fist upon the table with all the extravagance of an infuriated Frenchman; but hearing the footsteps of the men on the companion-ladder, he recovered himself with an astonishing effort, and exclaimed in his former light-hearted voice, taking the neck of the bottle in his hand:

'Monsieur, your glass is empty. I know this wine—it will not hurt you.'

Before I could answer him the men sent by Parell entered the cabin. One of them carried a lighted lantern, which I bade him set down whilst he helped his mate to run the table up the stanchions on which it slid, and to raise the trap-door. When this was lifted I peered down and noticed a row of steps nailed to a narrow bulkhead, and the rays of the lantern piercing the blackness, faintly disclosed the outlines of a number of chests, bales, casks,

etc., carefully stowed and apparently ranging forward past the narrow bulkhead on either hand to a considerable distance.

The Frenchman approached and looked down the trap-hatch for a few seconds, and then retired to the end of the cabin, and seated himself with his arms locked upon his breast.

‘This man,’ said I, addressing the seamen, ‘tells me that there are chests down there full of silver. Try the weight of one of them, and also look about you for some boxes of cigars.’

One of them dropped through the trap, and the other, after lowering the lantern, followed. With their bodies curved so that they looked on all-fours, and the lantern jerking the shadows of their faces here and there as they crawled about, the men rummaged as only sailors can, squeezing themselves into narrow corners, and accommodating their bodies to all manner of excruciating angles, puffing and blowing as they groped, and squirting tobacco-juice right and left, while through the stillness of the hold one could hear the gurgling of the

passing water and the sharp jar of the rudder on its pintles.

‘Here be the seegars, sir, I think!’ presently shouted out one of them; ‘aye, dozens on ’em!’ and prizing open the batten of what looked like a crate, he forked up a box of cheroots.

‘I can guarantee them fresh from the Manillas, sir,’ said the Frenchman from his corner.

‘Will you please help yourself,’ said I, giving him the box.

He opened the lid with the prong of a fork, and lighted a cigar, saying, as he resumed his seat, that tobacco was the best remedy for despair.

‘It’s blasted hot down here, sir!’ bawled one of the men. ‘There’s no moving of these cases, sir. Might as well try to lift a first-rate’s bower.’

However, I was determined to test the truth of the Frenchman’s statement, and told Ransom to send Parell aft with a hammer and prizing-bar.

‘What do you make in those canvas

bundles, men ?' said I. 'Snip a bit of the lacing, but mind how you do it.'

This was done.

'Why, what the deuce is it? yellow bunting?' I called.

They thumbed it, and peered at it and smelt it, and then rattled out :

'It's yaller silk, your honour—like what you see in Chaney, sir!'

And so it was, thousands of yards of it, packed (as only the Chinese *can* pack) in fine canvas covers. I turned to the Frenchman, who sat with his legs crossed, and his head thrown back, stroking his moustache, and puffing out tobacco-smoke.

'You have evidently the cargo of an East Indiaman in this hold?'

'The richest part of it, monsieur : silver, silk, some chests of ivory, and about sixteen tons of tea. The rest we left in the prize.'

'A nice little haul for the *Tigress*!' thought I; and I was nearly shouting 'Hurrah!'

Presently appeared Parell with the implements I had directed him to bring. The lamplight glistened in his perspiring face, and

I noticed the honest fellow bestow a distrustful scowl on the French mate after letting his eyes rest on the grim decorations of the cabin-ceiling.

I gave him the Frenchman's report of the contents of the hold, and bade him jump below and open one of the heavy chests that we might prove the value of the capture by our own eyesight. His face cleared when I talked of ivory and silver and silk, and swinging himself down the trap, he fell to work upon one of the heavy chests, and after some mighty hard hammering—for the corners were strongly clamped with iron—wedged open a split board. The lantern was raised, and the light sparkled upon a surface of white coined silver.

'That will do,' said I. 'Replace that board, Parell.'

The three of them came out of the hold, the trap was closed, and the table lowered.

'Here, Ransom, give Parell and these two men a glass of grog apiece. How does the schooner bear, Parell?'

'Steady on the starboard bow, sir.'

‘We *Tigresses* are in luck, men. If you add this capture to the corvette, our pockets won’t hold our shares.’

‘Ay, sir,’ answered Parell, ‘and I reckon the gells have the news already, for they’ve got the tow-ropes in their hands, and the two wessels are giving ’em all they can do to haul in the slack.’

Here they drank my health.

I sent the men forward to give the news of the value of the prize to their shipmates.

‘And mind, Parell,’ said I, ‘to keep a strong guard at both hatches, and on no account allow our men to converse with the English prisoners—that is, when the brutes are sober enough to talk.’

‘I hope monsieur is satisfied that I spoke the truth,’ said the French mate when the men had left the cabin.

‘Perfectly satisfied,’ I responded, lighting my pipe in preference to a cheroot, for, of all abominations, the flavour of Manilla tobacco is to me the greatest.

‘Were you ever in France, sir?’

‘Never.’

‘Nor I in England. I would to God that my first visit to your country were under other circumstances. I have heard that your prisons are detestable, though your gaolers are more humane than ours.’

‘You must look forward to a speedy exchange,’ said I.

‘Not as corsair!’ he exclaimed vehemently, with a sweeping passionate gesture of the hand. ‘Monsieur, who has a kind heart, will doubly pity me when he hears that I have been married but one little year. My poor wife called to me when I was leaving the house the last time, crying, “Jean, our baby is awake; come and kiss its eyes before thou goest.” My house is near the cathedral; and when I was nearly swooning in that abominable fore-castle before your men admitted the air, there were two sounds ringing in my ears—the cathedral bells, which were chiming as I turned back and leaned over my baby’s cradle, and the cry of the little one as it was fretted or frightened by this iron beard,’ taking his chin in his hand and looking at me with the tears in his eyes.

‘Are these crocodile tears?’ thought I, for truly, to behold such sentimental drops on his dark fierce visage was as confusing to all theories of ‘fitness’ as the association of the homely sweetness of wife and baby—of the spiritual gentleness of marital and paternal love, with the scowling, be-sashed and be-ringed figure of the maritime bravo.

‘Will monsieur listen to me?’ he suddenly exclaimed, dropping his cigar on the deck, and clasp^ging and extending his hands with a gesture of moving energy. ‘I have at my house, at St. Mâlo, a sum of fifteen hundred pounds (*livres*), the whole of which I would give for my liberty.’

I smoked my pipe in silence.

‘Monsieur,’ he continued, after a short pause, and speaking with such *intensity*—to use the only word that expresses the concentration of purpose, in his voice—that, like a physical effort, which indeed you may be willing to reckon it, it bedewed his forehead with large sweat-drops, and kindled an extraordinary brightness in his black eyes—‘is it

impossible for you to enrol me amongst your crew—to exclude me from the prisoners you will send ashore ?’

‘Impossible,’ I interrupted with a sternness I did not care to conceal, seeing what his entreaties were leading to, and rising as I spoke.

He sprang to his feet, and flashed a look at the weapons over his head. The menace was more than I could brook. I whipped the pistol from my pocket, and pointing it towards the companion-steps, I told him to be good enough to go on deck. He made a stiff inclination of the head, and with a light defiant swing of the body ascended the ladder, I at his heels ; and it was with a feeling of real relief that I saw him walk to the main-hatch and jerk himself down among his fellow-captives. Such was the abrupt ending of my well-meant kindness ; but in truth I was getting tired of the man, and my stock of French was all but expended.

Calling Parell to me, I bade him increase the guard at the main-hold by two men, and to train one of the smaller carronades against

the after-coaming, so that our friends might understand that though we did not intend to stifle them, we had no intention of giving them their own way either.

‘Is there any movement among the men in the fore-castle, Parell?’

‘There’s a lot of snoring going on, sir, and one of ’em shouted out just now, but I don’t reckon he meant it, or knew that he did it. Yet I fancy they’ll be rallying soon, for they seems to be growing oneasy. They’ll be sure to wake up parched thirsty, sir. If they ax for water, are they to have it, sir?’

‘Certainly; and you had better get a small cask filled ready for lowering down to them, along with some pannikins.’

I filled my pipe again and walked aft. The new moon was hanging over the sea in the west, and the breeze had freshened with the darkness. The black form of the schooner hung steadily on the weather-bow; they had fixed a lantern on her taffrail, the import of which I thoroughly understood, and she was leading me on a course from which I judged

it was Shelvocke's intention to fetch Plymouth.

It was a novel sensation to me to gaze around on the unfamiliar deck of the lugger, and at the immense lugs which swelled out overhead. She was sweeping through the water in grand style, churning up twice as much foam as the schooner threw up at her fastest, and to have looked over the sides and the stern at the tremendous spread of rushing froth, that widened away into the darkness like the tail of a comet, one would have supposed our pace something unheard of. But what were my feelings when, my sight having got used to the gloom, I perceived that the *Tigress* was keeping her distance and holding her station under her main-sail, jib, and stay-sail only ! I never felt prouder of the beautiful craft than at that moment. All the renown that the French luggers had obtained was almost entirely centred in their speed, for their cowardice was a by-word among English seamen ; they bolted from the sight of the smallest cruiser, and limited their depredations to the badly-armed merchantmen. But

here was as powerful a lugger as St. Mâlo had ever equipped and despatched, with all sail crowded and with the wind right abeam, so that every cloth was drawing, unable to keep pace with the *Tigress*, who showed only a third of the canvas she could unfold.

Our prisoners filled the sleeping-quarters of the lugger, and my men had therefore to take their rest upon deck ; but this was no hardship on a fine warm night. Some of the seamen had already disposed themselves near the guns and under the bulwarks, with coils of ropes for their pillows, their cutlasses upon their hips and pistols in their belts ; whilst at least twenty others kept watch at the hatches, or stumped the sloping deck of the forecastle on the look-out.

I kept watch until midnight, during all which time the breeze remained steady, and the schooner held her station with remarkable precision ahead. I then aroused Parell, who slept with enviable soundness in a sitting posture, with his back against the skylight, and told him to take the look-out whilst I lay down. But first I visited both hatches and

listened : all was still in the Frenchmen's quarters, though once I fancied I heard the sound of a hoarse whisper ; but it might have been the chafing of the sheet of the great main-lug, whose foot arched transversely across the wide deck. From the forecastle, however, there arose various sounds of gurgling and sleepy grumbling, with an occasional hoarse and barking yawn, and two of the bestial inmates called to one another, but in such drunken accents that I gave no heed to what was said.

‘Keep a smart eye upon these fellows, men,’ I said to the sentries. ‘When they come to they will want closer watching than the Frenchmen.’

And so saying, I went aft, and pitching on a spot near the tiller, I spread a big French ensign for a mattress, and lay down upon it, being much too anxious to bury myself in the cabin.

It was this anxiety, I suppose, that put it into my head to compare the interior of the lugger to a volcano, and assuredly the comparison was sufficiently apt, seeing the mass

of human combustibles that filled it. But the fancy set me dreaming of a volcano, to whose summit I had climbed with very great labour, for no other object than to be able to say I had sat upon it. I was enjoying the prospect of smiling country that stretched around, and speculating upon the nature and causes of volcanoes quite as cleverly, I dare say, as many wide-awake philosophers, when I felt the mountain throb under me very much as though some imprisoned giant was hammering inside, and I began to topple about in my seat. The smiling country grew rather tipsy, and cut a variety of ornamental capers. I held on in a high state of alarm, whilst I was jerked about like a man astride of the hump of a terrified camel. 'Good Lord!' thought I. A volume of smoke rushed up all around me, accompanied by a tremendous explosion, that was no doubt intended to drive me several miles high in the air, had I not cheated my ingenious imagination by opening my eyes and springing to my feet.

'What was that?'

The whole of my men were standing in

groups near the hatches, but the crowd was densest at the fore-castle, through whose open hatch there issued the muffled but hellish din of a fierce struggle. I rushed forward.

‘What is it, men?’ I shouted.

‘The Frenchmen have broken into the fore-castle, and are killing the Englishmen!’ was the answer.

The uproar that had reached me with a subdued note in the after-part of the vessel was fearfully distinct here. But the full horror of it did not strike me until my men had opened a passage and enabled me to get close to the hatch, down which I looked. Parell held a lantern, but the gleams penetrated the gloom but a short distance, and merely revealed now and again the glimmering figures of men tearing at one another like wild beasts, while the whole interior of the lugger rang with shrieks and drunken yells, and the crunching of bodies flung against the massive bulkheads and sides of the vessel.

‘Madmen!’ I shouted, ‘back to your quarters, or, by heaven, I will sweep the hold

with grape! Men! train a carronade forward—depress the muzzle into the forecastle!

The slide roared along the deck as it was dragged up to the hatch with a force that nearly ripped up the coaming. I had hoped the sound would still the monstrous combat; but, like oil upon fire, it only appeared to make it rage more furiously.

‘Parell! lower that lantern! small-arms-men, take aim and shoot every Frenchman you can distinguish.’

The boatswain’s mate bent a rope’s-end on to the lantern, and lowered it; scarcely had it sunk three feet below the deck when a blow shivered it into fragments, and the light was extinguished. What was to be done? It would have been sheer and brutal murder to fire among the seething mass who fought and yelled amid the blackness; but the consideration that the men whom the French men had fallen upon were half of them stupefied with drink, and that they were but sixteen opposed to twenty-five, so infuriated our seamen that Parell and myself had to threaten them with loaded pistols to stop

them from leaping into the fore-castle to aid the English.

‘Bring another lantern,’ I shouted. ‘Parell, take fifteen men and get down the main-hatch, and carry a couple of lanterns with you. You will take the prisoners in the flank, and shoot every man who refuses to come out of the fore-castle.’

This order was immediately executed. Meanwhile a second lantern had been lowered down the fore-hatch by a seaman, who covered the light with a pistol. The horrible struggle still raged, and I thought it the more deadly because it had become less noisy. The combatants had no other weapons than their hands, but by the dim lantern-light I could perceive that they fought with their teeth and feet as well as their fists; and what with the drunken ferocity of the Englishmen on one side, and the mad revengeful spirit of the Frenchmen on the other, the scene of grappling and twisting figures, of motionless bodies stamped upon as a labourer beats down the earth with his hob-nailed boots, of wrestling forms whirling into the sphere of the rays

and vanishing into the darkness beyond, aided by the snapping of teeth, the groans of the wounded, the fierce breathing, the sudden thrilling cries of pain, was one of such abounding horror as no man could imagine the like of who had not witnessed it.

‘Let ten men follow me!’ I sung out. ‘Use your cutlasses only. Hold that lantern steady, my man, and jump down with it as we drive the prisoners aft! The rest remain to guard the hatches.’

Snatching a cutlass from the hand of one of the seamen, I sprang into the forecastle with a string of *Tigresses* after me. It is impossible to describe the scene that followed. It was one of those wild, impetuous, confused struggles which give a man no chance of noticing what happens. My object was to drive the prisoners out of the narrow forecastle into the roomier ’tween decks, where we should at least find space to swing our arms in. The instant I gained my feet I fell sprawling over a body ; but quickly recovering myself, and making a sweeping blow with the flat of my cutlass at the arms of a ferocious Englishman

who was probably still too drunk to distinguish between friends and foes, and who was levelling his huge claws at my throat, I formed the men into a line, and by dint of thrusting with our hands and feet and pricking with our cutlasses, we bodily drove the combatants past the fittings of the bulk-head, which the Frenchmen—who knew their vessel better than we—had removed, where, as they arrived, they were seized by Parell's men and pinioned with lines flung down the hatchway for the purpose. The Frenchmen offered no resistance, but the English fought like cats, and when their arms were bound behind them and their legs secured they snapped at my men with their teeth, and spat at them in the impotence of their passion. In truth, they were rendered perfect devils by the drink ; they took us to be a portion of the Frenchmen who had broken in on their drunken sleep, and their brute courage operating as an instinct, and being all of them very powerful men, we had so much difficulty in pinioning them that I was in momentary fear of the temper of the *Tigresses*, and had

several times to warn them not to use their cutlasses.

The lanterns illuminated an extraordinary picture. On one side of the deck were the Frenchmen, some of them bound back to back, some singly pinioned, standing or sitting, their quick savage breathing filling the hollow 'tween-decks with a sharp rushing noise, many of them covered with blood, their clothes half torn from their backs, and whole clouds of steam issuing from their bodies, as you may have seen the smoke rising from the hide of a driven horse on a winter's day. On the opposite or starboard side were the Englishmen, a small and brutal-looking band, writhing on their bellies, or straining at their bindings as they lay prostrate on their backs, but every man bound by turn upon turn of rope round his limbs, so as to resemble a mummy, or, better still, a fly after the spider has revolved him two or three times.

I do believe that a low inebriated Briton—this word gives a place to Pat as well as John Bull—offers the ugliest picture of intoxication that can be found the whole world over.

Frenchmen, Spaniards, Italians, Russians—I am speaking of the lowest orders—may be more malignant and dangerous in their cups ; but for vileness, vulgarity, brutality of language and conduct, and for a remarkable capacity of making every hair on his head and every rag on his back, and the very toes which peer out of his broken boots, look as drunk as his eyes, face, limbs, and motions, the low-bred Briton, who never will be a slave—except to the bottle—is without a rival. There lay these reeking savages, shouting and cursing, and rolling their horrid eyes about them, and working themselves into white-hot fury as they struggled in vain to free their arms and legs. Expostulations, entreaties, commands, were of no earthly use ; like savage beasts they would have continued yelling at us with the muzzles of our muskets at their foreheads.

Some of them had received terrible injuries ; like the Frenchmen they were covered with blood, and their clothes were in ribands. I counted them and found the number eleven, while three of the Frenchmen

were missing. Followed by Parell I entered the fore-castle, observing as I did so that the bulkhead consisted of stout movable panels, the removal of which left a clear space from the main-mast to the head of the vessel ; and here lay a number of bodies. I never would have believed it possible that unarmed human beings could mutilate their fellow-creatures to the extent these prostrate figures indicated. To look upon the torn flesh and broken limbs one would have imagined that half-a-dozen jaguars had been at work. The curses and cries and barking sounds uttered by the Englishmen beyond the bulkhead added a new element of horror to the ghastly scene, and the men who had followed us stood looking on with pale faces and aghast expressions, as Parell, holding a lantern, moved about this floating charnel-house, examining the countenances of the bodies.

However, it was necessary for a second time to clear this dismal and tragical fore-castle, and the bodies were accordingly handed up and placed in a row on the deck. A strong muster of our seamen then seized the English

prisoners, and dragged them, howling and shouting, and bound as they were, into the forecastle; the bulkhead was replaced, and a guard stationed to keep the two gangs of captives separated.

I went on deck with a reeling step and a giddy head. My nerves had stood the carnage of the forecastle, the struggle, the sight of the wounded men, the monstrous spectacle of the bleeding and torn Englishmen; but the scene of dead illumined by the wavering rays of the lantern had nearly proved too much for me, and I leaned against the mizzen-mast trembling like a half-drowned poodle. But the cool night air braced me up, and a glass of grog, which I ordered the boy to smuggle through the skylight, gave me back my old strength.

‘Well, Parell,’ said I, as the honest fellow, catching sight of me, came over to where I stood, ‘what of those miserable creatures? Are they *all* dead?’

‘Two of them are alive, sir,’ he answered; ‘but the rest look to be clean done for.’

‘Who could have supposed that a movable

bulkhead divided the men! Why, this is ten times worse than an engagement. How goes the time?' I looked at my watch. 'Ten minutes to two. I had a mind to signal the schooner and hail her to send the surgeon; but we shall be having daylight soon, and meanwhile we will wait to see if more of those bodies there show any signs of life.'

And when daylight at last broke, never was the dawning grey of the east more gladly welcomed by me. I watched the horizon darkening into a deep black line against the pallid heaven, and the gradual unfolding of the waters away on the port beam, and the slow shifting of the sky from the cold indigo of night into a tender azure that was growing pink in the east, until at last the whole surface of the restless and creaming deep was exposed, with the sloping form of the schooner ahead trailing a long line of snow astern of her, and the foam falling away from her weather-side, and her cloud-like canvas swelling from the tapering spars whose topmost points presently caught the silver fire of the rising sun; and as the glorious luminary sailed above the sea,

there flashed star-like points of exceeding brilliance upon the schooner's bright masts and in her streaming sides, and the sallow hue of her canvas changed into a glossy whiteness, like the breast of the albatross. 'Ah, Master Shelvocke,' thought I, with something like a pang of envy, 'little wot you of the hideous nightmare your prize crew and their officer have been forced to dream this blessed night, now most mercifully gone !'

I called to one of the men :

'Hoist this French flag at the main. So — let it blow out a few feet below the truck.'

The signal was immediately answered on the *Tigress* by the ensign at the peak ; the clew of her mainsail was hauled up, her jib-sheet flowed, and presently the two vessels were side by side.

'Schooner ahoy !'

'Hallo !' shouted Chestree, who stood on the lee bulwarks with his arm around a backstay.

'There has been an affray between the French and English prisoners. Eight men

killed and wounded. Send Corney aboard. I will heave to when you are ready.'

He tossed his hands with a gesture of amazement. Presently the boatswain's pipe sounded, and at the same moment Shelvocke's fine figure upreared itself on the rail.

'You can heave to, Mr. Madison!' he shouted, his powerful voice coming down upon the wind like a bugle-call. A boat was lowered, and in a few minutes Corney stepped on board the lugger.

I had no fancy to attend the surgeon whilst he examined the bodies, and therefore stood leaning over the lugger's side watching the *Tigress* as she lay with her sails quivering in the wind, gently pitching upon the emerald-green seas.

After some time Corney came aft and told me that only two of the men were alive.

'I never saw death in a more terrible form,' said he, evidently much shocked. 'They must have fought like fiends. Had a blue-light been burned in the forecastle when these men were fighting, looking down the

hatchway would have been like peering into the infernal regions.'

'It was like hell itself, Corney. It wanted no blue-light.'

'I would recommend the bodies to be thrown overboard at once, Mr. Madison.'

I gave the necessary instructions, and then proceeded to acquaint Corney, for the information of Shelvocke, with the value of the lugger; whereat the consternation that the sight of the dead had raised in him melted out of his face, and was replaced by an extravagant grin of satisfaction.

'One hundred thousand dollars!' cried he. 'And ivory and tea, and silk, too! God bless my heart! If this goes on, I shall be able to fling my surgical instruments overboard.'

He waited until the dead had been dropped over the side, and then returned to the schooner, singing out to the boat's crew, as he flopped into the stern-sheets, that the lugger was full of minted silver and silk and ivory, and begging them to give way, so that the news might be immediately given to the captain. As soon as he had shoved off, the sails

of the lugger were trimmed, and we were once more pushing through the sparkling waters.

It was an amazingly inspiriting morning, and my men, in spite of their hard night's watching, were in high spirits as they bustled to and fro, clearing up the decks, and cracking marine witticisms on the guns and rigging of the lugger, and peering into the hatchways, some of them stripped to their waists forward, dashing buckets of water over one another, while others lighted the fire in the little caboose for breakfast.

I watched the *Tigress* hoist in her boat, and fall off before the wind and come tearing after us, with the bright surges bursting away in smoke from her keen stem ; and as she tore past us, her men sprang upon the bulwarks and gave three hearty cheers, which their shipmates in the lugger instantly responded to.

‘Keep her smoking, Madison!’ roared Shelvocke ; ‘both anchors must be down in Cawsand Bay before sunset.’

And this actually happened ; for at four o'clock that afternoon the *Tigress*, who

headed us by about a mile, hoisted her ensign and fired two guns, the meaning of which was presently rendered apparent by our heaving up a blue film on the starboard bow that proved to be Bolt Head. The sun was setting as, under a press of sail and with a strong north-easterly wind blowing, we swept along astern of the schooner, passed Mewstone Ledge, with Penlee Point on the port bow and the shores of Cawsand Bay looming dark against the red evening sky, and throwing into noble relief a fleet of eight large merchantmen who were riding in groups upon the dark blue tumble.

Plymouth Sound lay open to us with lights springing up ashore and flashing fitfully across the running waters, as the air darkened and the stars sparkled and faded among the driving clouds like the revolving lantern of a beacon. Swirling past the merchantmen who occupied the Bay betwixt Cawsand and the Broady Coves, and whose forecastles were crowded with men who watched the lugger much as a crowd of flies might be supposed to stare at a captured spider, we rounded to


under the stern of a dashing frigate and let go our anchors, and never before had the splash of iron flukes and the tearing of the hemp through the hawse-holes fallen more gratefully upon my ears.

Shelvocke boarded the frigate, and presently returned, followed by her launch, pinnace, and first cutter full of seamen and marines, who, to my inexpressible comfort, cleared the two vessels of their prisoners, and carried them away to the port-admiral's ship up Hamoaze ; and within an hour and a half of our bringing up, I was in the cabin of the *Tigress* enjoying a good supper, some excellent cold grog, and a lively chat with my worthy captain.



CHAPTER II.

LADY TEMPEST'S BALL.

 HE hope of reaching Brest in time to fetch the outward-bound convoy could no longer be indulged, though, considering the value of the lugger, none of us had any fault to find with the cause that had stopped our project. Yet rich as the prize proved—her cargo being actually assessed at thirty-five thousand pounds—no capture ever gave more trouble than that of the *Droit Maritime*. The owners of the polacre brig that had been taken by the Frenchmen and sent into Granville, claimed the lugger and cargo on the ground that she was in possession of a part of the crew of the brig when we boarded her. This was true ;

but our contention was that the said crew, at the time we boarded the lugger, were drunk and incapable, and that their condition was tantamount to the virtual abandonment of the vessel. I cannot remember more of the arguments of the lawyers than this; but I know we were detained three weeks at Plymouth, during which time I must have kissed the Bible over not less than a dozen affidavits; and I got so sick at last of the visits of the attorney, that whenever I saw him coming I used to hide myself. I may as well say that the case was decided by Lord Stowell, some months afterwards, in Hannay's favour; but what became of the English seamen, who in my opinion richly deserved to be hanged for the death of the wretched Frenchmen, I did not inquire at the time, and so cannot now say.

Whilst we lay at Plymouth, the *Tigress* was visited by a great number of persons; for the value of the prize and the lawsuit about it had made some noise, and the name we had earned by our action with the corvette was not yet forgotten.

Among half-a-dozen invitations received

by Shelvocke and myself to as many different houses, was one to a ball given by an old rich knight, in celebration of a remarkable victory obtained by his son, who commanded an English sloop-of-war, over two large French frigates. This ball dates the beginning of as romantic an experience as was probably ever encountered by a sailor.

Invitations to it had been sent out for the night preceding the day on which we sailed : and as I was immensely fond of dancing, I had eagerly looked forward to this chance of having a regular sailor's frisk with a lively partner.

'Rather unusual for privateersmen to be asked into select companies,' Shelvocke had said to me drily. 'Hope we shan't frighten the dandies.'

I hoped so too ; and to provide against any likelihood of a scare, we took some trouble over our togs ; and whatever figure I may have cut, I will say that Shelvocke, with his masculine rugged breadth of forehead, sunburnt face, tawny beard, and noble stature, that was improved with the inimitable grace

of the sailor's movements, impressed me, as he stepped forth in full fig, as one of the handsomest and most manly creatures it had ever been my fortune to behold.

It is so many years since I was at Plymouth, that I cannot clearly recall the geographical position of our host's residence. It was about a quarter of a mile out of the town, and was a small but very nobly wooded estate, and the house like a castle. The owner, Sir William Tempest, had caused the beautiful avenue that led to the house to be hung with coloured paper lanterns, a great number of which glimmered among the trees which extended on either hand ; and the effect of these lights twinkling in blues and greens and yellows among the deep shadows, and the dense volumes of the lofty trees towering against the bright stars, and the newly risen moon silvering the upper stories of the castellated building and lying in delicate jasper-like lines upon the lower walls which received the pure beam through an opening here and there in the trees, and the contrast of the mellow illumination of candles upon

the tall windows with the vista of coloured lamps along which the eye roved to the house — formed a night-scene of soft and peaceful beauty that was immensely heightened to the senses by the rich smell of leaves and dew-moistened sward, and great beds of lilies and roses and other sweet flowers.

We were among the late arrivals; so that, when we entered the long and lofty drawing-rooms, we found nearly all the company assembled, and many persons dancing to a capital band of music. Of course, two-thirds at least of the males were naval officers; and their sparkling epaulets and bright buttons and laced collars, mingling with various military costumes and black civilian coats, and the gleaming satins and silks and the white shoulders and arms and the flashing diamonds and the flowers of the ladies, made a brave and brilliant show under the blazing candelabra and the rows of sconces.

There were upwards of two hundred people present, but the large rooms would have held another hundred without the least crushing. The walls were hung with banners, and an

immense red English ensign drooped at each end of the room ; and in a large recess opposite the beautifully carved old-fashioned chimney-piece there was an emblematic contrivance that was probably considered appropriate to the occasion, though I did not much admire the taste that suggested it. It consisted of a small boat carronade, with a cleverly-constructed lay figure of an English seaman in the act of discharging the gun, and a large number of projecting poles, on which were suspended the flags of all nations, the whole topped by a tall staff, upon which was midway hoisted a mutilated French flag, and above it the English colours. This piece of nonsense was meant to typify Britain's supremacy over all the countries of the world, and more particularly over Monsieur Crapeau. Some of the naval officers appeared to admire it, but for my part, as I have said, I thought it a twopenny affair, fit only to amuse little boys ; and as it stood upon a fragile draped scaffold, I was vicious enough to hope that some of the dancers would capsize it before the night was out.

We were received with great kindness by Lady Tempest, whose white hair, fresh complexion, motherly smile, soft eyes, and winning confidentiality of manner, as though she had so much to say and would so immensely enjoy a quiet chat with you, made her one of the pleasantest-looking and nicest old ladies a man could wish to meet. She kept us talking just long enough to mention her son's name, and I could have hugged Shelvocke for the pleasure he gave her by his hearty, honest, generous applause of Captain Tempest's gallant conduct. Then her husband, a timid, gentle, little old man, in black silk stockings and metal buttons on his long-tailed coat, came up and welcomed us, and took Shelvocke over to a knot of naval officers, while her ladyship, catching me with a pretty gesture by the hand, led me up to a haughty young person who was studying her fan under Jonathan's stripes and stars.

She was the handsomest-dressed woman in the room, and I have no doubt the worst-tempered—quite insolent in her questions; so that presently I grew resentful, and learning

from her that her father was a rear-admiral and a lord, I recollected the learned Doctor Samuel Johnson's behaviour on a like occasion, and said that although I was a sailor, I never pretended to be anything better than a pirate, that I got my bread by plundering merchant ships and despatching honest men : that polite people termed me a privateer, but that I liked to call things by their right names.

After this we danced like automatons, and she then asked me to be good enough to take her to her papa, a puffed-out, red-faced old man in an embroidered naval uniform, the breast of which was covered with decorations. I made her a low bow, which she returned with a sublime curtsy, the overwhelming *sweepingness* of which was no doubt meant to cover me with confusion and awe, and I believe that no couple ever got rid of each other more rejoicingly than she and I.

Seeing Shelvocke standing alone, I joined him.

'I rather suspected,' said he, 'that when the epaulets found me out they would serve

me with the cold shoulder. "Give privateersmen the stem!" is the cry, you know, among those fellows. But heaven has blessed me with uncommon fortitude, and success teaches patience.'

'Why don't you dance, captain? There are surely enough pretty women in the room to console you for the neglect of your own sex.'

'The reason why I don't dance is extremely simple—I can't dance. By the way, who, think you, makes one of yonder group?' indicating with a movement of his head the officers to whom Sir William had introduced him.

I looked, and answered I could not imagine.

'You remember the surly captain of the frigate who left the little brig to do all the hard work, and missed the French liner after all?'

'Perfectly well.'

'Well, there he stands. His name is Monk—that ring-faced man to the right of the tall grey-haired chap.'

‘I see him, and now I remember his face.’

‘Singularly enough,’ he continued, ‘they were talking of this very engagement when Sir William introduced me. I heard one man say, “Monk, your *Andromache* was not up to the mark : her *Astyanax* was *not* saved from the flames ; ’tis a bad reading of your ‘*Iliad*,’ but——” I lost the rest, but the word *Andromache* made me look at my man, and I then recollected him.’

I watched Captain Monk whilst Shelvocke spoke, and noticed the ludicrously pompous airs he gave himself as he stood, apparently engrossing all the conversation, in the midst of half-a-dozen naval men.

‘You remember how extremely rude the fellow was when I proffered such assistance as was in my power ?’ continued Shelvocke. ‘I thought of his impudent boorish manner as I listened to him talking about his action with the Frenchman, and determined to take him off his own peg and hang him upon one considerably lower down. So addressing myself, to him, I said I had witnessed the action from the deck of a privateer *I had the honour*

to command—always put on a cocked-hat, Madison, when you talk of your own calling ; if I swept a crossing my broom should never lack importance from my lips ;—and that I was much impressed with the gallantry with which the vessels swept down upon their huge opponent : and having oiled him with this feather I applied the clyster. I praised the brig up to the skies : I said it was deplorable that so much bravery should have been left unsupported by the frigate ; I should have been only too glad, I continued, to have brought the schooner into the conflict had not the captain of the brig requested me to remain a looker-on, and I explained my sensitiveness in the matter of interference by relating the story of our engagement with the French corvette ; there was no lack of courage on the part of the frigate, said I, but she was so unskilfully handled as to make me hope in the interests of the naval service that Captain Monk had not omitted to represent the incompetency of the sailing-master in his despatch to my lords. That was corrosive enough, wasn't it, Madison ?'

I laughed and thought to myself, no wonder they have given him the cold shoulder.

'You would have split your sides to see the man's face,' said Shelvocke. 'One or two of the officers walked away, either afraid of their gravity or of a 'scene.' But there was no fear of the latter. I was much too courteous for a riot, and passed my criticism so interrogatively that I believe the man scarcely knew whether I talked to insult him or from an honest thirst for information.'

At this moment Sir William brought up a middle-aged gentlemanly man, with whom Shelvocke immediately and cordially shook hands, and who proved to be an East India merchant who had twice sailed with Shelvocke to and from Bombay. I was glad to see the captain in tow of an old friend, and one I had already noticed as shaking hands and appearing on very friendly terms with some of the highest naval and military officers in the room ; but as I had come to this ball to dance I hauled off from the quarter-deck yarn these two men began to spout, and presently had the luck to obtain an introduc-

tion to a young lady whose frank and beautiful eyes had previously attracted my attention and won my admiration as she executed a very dull and solemn dance hand-in-hand with a glittering, jingling, youthful third lieutenant.

An English *lady* is the first woman in the world for manners, and one hour of her spiritual elegance and bland and soothing graces is worth whole years of the quilted dignities and cultivated airs of foreign grand dames. I don't like to be poetical—the popular idea of Jack is so intimately blended with rum, tobacco, and vulgar bluntness, that a sailor is almost afraid of appearing in any other character than the one which novelists and actors have invented for him, lest he should not only wound a deep-rooted prejudice, but even be snubbed as an imposition; therefore I don't like to be poetical: but I scarcely know how to convey the impression Miss Madeline Palmer—for that was her name—produced upon me, if I may not say that talking to her and looking into her face was like breathing the fragrance of a beautiful flower. So there you have it.

She was young—not more than nineteen—with a rich contralto laugh that had more melody in it than many a fine singer's voice : yet fresh and womanly as was her face, with the large, wistful, honest grey eyes, and soft, faintly-flushed complexion—like the hue of clear flesh in a pink light—and arched upper lip, and the nose slightly, but how slightly ! *turned-up*—have we no romantic definition in our vocabulary of this delicious stroke in the face of beauty ?—like the fascinating organ of Lady Cleveland, as I have beheld it in the portrait of that amorous romp ; and the square, snow-white forehead, topped with a glorious thickness of golden-brown hair divided on the right side, glittering with the gold-dust that in those days ladies sprinkled over their heads with great effect, and hanging with a breezy look, and sparkling in golden threads over her brows, the starboard one of which was decorated with a sweet little mole designed by nature to contrast the exceeding whiteness of her skin ; while her plump yet maidenly figure was dressed, as it should be, in white satin with short sleeves, and a light green

drapery of crape fastened on the left shoulder with an amber brooch, folded so as to conceal the left side of her figure in front ; and long, white kid gloves, betwixt the top of which and the green chenille trimming of the sleeves the white, firm, round flesh of her arms looked like a carving in finest ivory ; and exquisitely-fitting shoes of green silk ; and around her throat a string of pearls and a small cross of diamonds, concealing, but suggesting too, the little hollow, of which the swelling satin that rounded away from this point, and curved back again into a tapering waist, was the reserved but sufficient expression ; I say—but bless me, what *was* I saying ? Ah ! I have it : that sweet and womanly as were the face and form of this girl, yet these outward and visible signs, as constituents of her fresh and fascinating being, were as naught compared with the indescribable graces of her cordial, tender, modest, and most winning manners. No airs, no simpering, no stupid observations : we danced, and then sauntered into a brilliant anteroom full

of flowers, and tables covered with refreshments—how true is Horace :

‘ Difficile est proprie communia dicere !’

how is a man fresh from the study of a woman’s beauty to describe *eatables* !—where we sipped wine and coquetted with the jellies, while we fell into a talk that missed me two dances.

She proved to be the daughter of a Colonel Palmer, whose regiment had been for some time in Jamaica, but the last letter she had received from him warned her that his health was bad, and that it was probable he would be forced to return home by the end of the year. Since the receipt of those letters she had met a friend of the colonel, who had alarmed her by saying that her father was looking seriously ill, and that he ought undoubtedly to act upon the advice of his doctor and return home.

‘ But papa is a very obstinate man, Mr Madison,’ said she, ‘ and is quite likely to linger on in that dreadful climate with the idea that he is serving his country by ruining

his health, until it will be too late for him to receive any benefit from a change of air. So I am going out to bring him home. I am his only child, and his objection to my remaining in the bad climate of Jamaica will be sure to induce him to come home with me if I refuse—which I mean to do—to return alone.'

I asked when she sailed, and she said in a day or two; the vessel in which she had taken her passage had that morning arrived in Cawsand Bay. For the last fortnight she had been Lady Tempest's guest, but her home was near Canterbury, in Kent.

On my telling her that I had been mate of an Indiaman for some years, she asked me many questions about the life on board ship, and listened to me with such graceful, kindly interest, that I was induced to prolong my conversation beyond the warrant of good manners. I know not how it came about, nor what there was in me to merit so high an honour, but she talked to me with as little reserve as she could have shown had I been an old friend, and seemed almost reluctant to leave the comparative quietude of the refresh-

ment-room when I offered my arm to conduct her out of it.

I found other partners, and whisked through several dances ; but the moment I saw Miss Palmer alone again, I went to her, and the rest of the night I spent almost entirely at her side. I never passed a pleasanter, happier time. The rooms were full of pretty women, the dancers among the men had no difficulty in finding partners, love-making grew general as the night advanced, and these little conditions of this delightful ball enabled me to keep Miss Palmer very much to myself. I talked to her about my privateering experiences, asked her if she was not frightened to dance with a corsair, told her (when she asked the question) that yonder tall, powerful, handsome man was Captain Shelvocke, the commander of the vessel I was first officer of, described to her our fight with the corvette, and my experiences aboard the *Droit Maritime* ; and she chatted to me about her Aunt Matilda, and her pretty home near Canterbury, and her dear papa, whose name she pronounced with exquisite fond-

ness, and her mother, who had been dead seven years.

Indeed no two people could have found more to talk about than she and I. As the hours wore away, and the spirit of the revelry grew strong, the scene of the ball-room was amazingly brilliant with the glitter of uniforms among the gleaming dresses of the ladies, the flash and play of white arms and white necks, and gaudy turbans and stately feathers, and medals and dress-swords, and sweet, fair faces looking one way, and sunburnt, handsome faces looking another way ; while the banners swayed under the breezing of the sweeping skirts, and here and there a picturesque background was formed of grave dowagers nodding to the music and watching the dancers, and stiff old sea-officers in costumes of a Rodney pattern, figged-out old sea-monsters, one with an empty sleeve, another with one eye ; and a sprinkling of military coats and gold lace and bullion fringe and warlike whiskers.

The supper was really a magnificent affair, in a wing of the house that was all one room,

and as big as a church, and not unlike the inside of a church either; hundreds of candles, more flags, flowers everywhere; long tables crowded with silver and crystal wherein the candles shone like the sun in a calm sea, and dishes of things the mere sight of which would have kept an alderman smiling in his sleep for years; champagne fizzing in all directions like the froth through the scupper-holes of a wave-swept ship; fellows in liveries tumbling against each other; old gentlemen and old ladies eating, young gentlemen whispering, young ladies giggling; and, to crown all—bear me witness, some Plymouth centenarian!—speeches!

The King's health was drunk. General A. quavered out thanks for the army: 'It always *had* done its duty; it always *would* do its duty.' Admiral B., who rose with a napkin pinned over his decorations, grumbled out his thanks in a deep-sea note for the navy: 'Hearts of oak—Frenchmen afraid of us—St. Vincent—the Nile—hurrah!' But the toast of the evening was Captain Tempest (at whose name we all cheered until the

vaulted room rattled to the cordial broad-side), whose absence was explained by his having been ordered to join the North Sea squadron with urgent despatches. His health was proposed by the port-admiral—a fine jovial-faced old man, with a head like Collingwood's—in a bluff speech that set dear old Lady Tempest crying with pride, and made her modest little husband blush like a purple dahlia ; and when the port-admiral wound up by exclaiming, with kindling eyes, and holding a full wine-glass over the turban of a stout lady on his right as if he intended to pour the libation among her feathers before he sat down, that the fine young officer had given one more proof by the gallant fight he had made that Nelson's immortal signal before the battle of Trafalgar (*Hip, hip, hurrah !*) still flew wherever a British man-of-war was to be found, we cheered again and again, springing to our feet and shouting at the top of our voices ; in the middle of which, and producing an effect that raised our enthusiasm (backed as it was by champagne) to fever-pitch, five twelve-pound guns (the concussion of which,

by the way, broke several windows) were discharged on the lawn in front of the house, the ladies shrieked, dress swords were jingled, and a military band outside struck up 'Rule Britannia.'

After all this we were invited on to the lawn to view the fireworks ; there was a rush for shawls, and I had the happiness to robe the beautiful shoulders of Miss Palmer, and to follow the clanking, rustling, sparkling and nodding line of guests with this delightful girl on my arm.

'And 'twas pretty to see how, like birds of a feather,
The people of quality flock'd all together.'

The night was calm and cloudless. The moon, who, like other middle-aged ladies, had risen late, floated with half her silver disc obscured ; but her sweet beam was too mild to vex the gaiety of the clusters of coloured lanterns which hung in festoons all round the wide lawn where the cannons had been fired, and where a military band (by kind permission of the roman-nosed colonel who had sat opposite to me at the supper-table, and drank

champagne enough to launch a bomb-ship in) was rattling out martial music. Away beyond the lawn was a magnificent denseness of towering trees, amid the intricacies of which the lanterns glimmered like fire-flies.

Of all fine effects I never witnessed anything more striking than the aspect of our numerous and vari-coloured assembly, when all on a sudden, a number of red, blue, and green fires were burnt, as a hint that the pyrotechnical drama was about to begin. The sudden stopping of promenading groups ; the quivering of the prismatic hues in jewels, buttons, bullion-fringe, sword-hilts, and bright eyes ; the ghostly colouring of faces ; the star-like sparkles of the dew-drops upon the grass ; the long double shadows cast by the mingled light of the moon and the coloured fires upon the sward on which we stood ; the boughs of the nearer trees which seemed to writhe and twist like snakes forking out from the huge trunks, as the fires waned and brightened ; the sickly uniform pallor of the flowers, as though some deadly breath had passed over their

petals; and extinguished their bright hues—it was the best part of the fireworks.

‘Enough to make one think of the last day,’ said I to Miss Palmer, ‘when some of our decorated braves will be wanting to dodge the light that shows their stars and medals to be fashioned out of human blood, when the biggest diamond among us will not be reckoned half so beautiful as a pauper’s tear, and when all the feathers our turbans can muster shall not furnish the lightest-weight lieutenant with a pair of wings.’

‘Rather profane, but true, Mr. Madison,’ she answered; ‘and it only shows how wicked even the nicest people must be when a little red and blue fire makes them look like—imps.’

The fireworks were excellent, but a little of that sort of buzzing and fizzing and banging goes a long way with me; and Miss Palmer being of my mind, we presently found ourselves wandering after a few detached couples among the flower-gardens to the right of the house, where the strains of the band reached us with a softened note, and

where we had an excuse to pause often over the dewy fragrance of the beds of dahlias, lilies, starworts, pinks, roses, pentstemons, and all the rest of them—I never can remember the names of flowers, nor the months in which they flourish—which lay in pale spaces on either hand of us.

When the final rocket exploded, the band played 'God save the King,' which was immediately followed by the drawing-room fiddlers striking up a piece of dance music, for we had not strayed so far but that these notes reached us as they floated through the open windows; so we returned to the house, and for the rest of the night I danced with nobody but Madeline Palmer, who seemed perfectly happy and satisfied with her partner; and when the ball broke up amid the twittering of birds, and in the pink haze of the budding morning, before I parted from my sweet companion I begged a flower from her as a memorial of the delightful hours I had passed in her society, saying romantically, and, as I apprehend, collectedly, having regard to the hour, and how redolent the air

was of champagne, that it would sweeten with its fragrance the rough life I should be renewing in a few hours, and that nothing would better emblemise the happiness she had given me.

‘Because it will fade very soon, do you mean?’ she said, with her rich laugh, but taking the flower from her bosom and giving it to me cordially, and without the least embarrassment.

I bowed, she curtsied, and, as much in love as any fool could well be at first sight, I went to look for Shelvocke. I found him waiting for me outside the avenue, and the moment we got under weigh he lighted a cigar.

‘Well, Madison,’ said he, ‘do you come away with a broken heart?’

‘Pooh, pooh! my dear sir, when a man gets to my time of life he doesn’t allow a little harmless flirtation to affect his happiness. I have danced, I have drank, I have been alarmed by the explosion of guns, I am immensely indebted to the most hospitable of ladies for one of the most delightful of nights, and to-morrow—nay, by George! this very

blessed day, captain, we go in quest of more booty.' Here I heaved a deep sigh.

He took my arm, but as I imagined that he did so to steady me, and as I did not consider I required any support, I wriggled away from him, whereat he laughed, and offered me a cigar. I halted to light it at the cigar in his mouth.

'Would you kindly keep your cigar steady, captain?' I exclaimed, as I found the glowing tip dodging first this side and then that, and eluding all my efforts to fix it; 'or can it be the effect of the dancing lingering in my feet? Any man might suppose that we are still shaking a leg,'—here I caught his cigar, and at the same moment his eye, the expression in which made me break into a shout of laughter. The laugh did me good, and methought I took the ground with a steadier stride.

He continued to rally me somewhat, saying that my partner was the prettiest girl in the room, that he had watched me flinging my nautical heels about with envy and admiration, and wondered where the deuce I had got that trick of making love, so to speak, with the

part of my face that was turned to the young lady, whilst the other part that was exhibited to the public gaze expressed the utmost modesty and the most genteel consideration for other people's feelings.

To caulk his banter I asked him if anything more had passed between him and Captain Monk.

'Why, yes,' he answered quietly. 'A good deal more. He came up to me on the lawn during the fireworks—I was alone—and asked me in the most impertinent manner in the world what my object had been in cross-examining him on the subject of his action with the line-of-battle ship. He was rather *fou* as the Scotch say, for it was after supper, you know. I answered that I asked for information. "If that was your motive," said he, "you might have saved yourself a great deal of trouble by confessing your intention at once, and I should have been glad to refer you to a three-and-sixpenny treatise on the mariner's calling, which would have acquainted you with all the professional duties—not manners, sir; a book on manners would cost you

another three-and-sixpence—but the professional duties of which you appear to be ignorant.” “I am surprised,” said I, “that you should know of any such treatise, after the specimen of seamanship I was a witness of.” After insulting each other in this fashion for some minutes he walked away. Whilst I was waiting for you, a naval officer sauntered up to me, said, with a bow, he believed he had the honour of addressing Captain Shelvocke of the privateer schooner *Tigress*, informed me that Captain Monk claimed satisfaction for the affront I had put upon him, and desired me to refer him to a gentleman who would act as my second. I begged permission to waive all ceremony—the fact is, Madison, I had not the heart to lug you from your charming companion into a business of this kind—and assured the officer that if he would appoint place and time I would very punctually attend upon Captain Monk and bring a friend with me. “We sail at noon,” said I, “and I have therefore to request that the affair be despatched quickly.” So it was arranged that I should meet Captain Monk

at seven o'clock, at a secluded spot near Cat-water. I am to land at the flag-staff, and the officer will conduct me to the shooting-place. I have to ask you to be my second, Madison.'

'Certainly, captain.'

'I am not a vindictive animal, but there is something in this Monk that is detestable, and if I can put a bullet into him I will,' he said. 'I have ascertained that he has the character of a tyrant, and to judge by his seamanship the service can very well afford to lose him ; though, mind, I will always say he brought his frigate into action gallantly.'

'Rather sharp work, sir,' said I, pulling out my watch ; 'it is already past four. One moment toppling about with a lovely partner through halls of dazzling light and amid scenes of more than Eastern splendour, and the next—O, Lord !'

'What's the matter with you ?'

'Why I have put the lighted end of my cigar into my mouth, sir. By the way, captain, what about pistols ?'

'I have the weapon I require on board.'

'Really, sir,' I exclaimed, beginning to feel

maudlin, 'this is an unfortunate business. I hope the man's a bad shot. If you should be winged, captain, or made a sheer hulk of like poor Tom Bowline, whose face was of the manliest beauty, what's to become of us *Tigresses* ?'

'Steady, my friend, steady!' he sung out, as I lurched up against him. 'Here, take my arm, man ; nothing like a lee-board for a craft that sails three sheets in the wind.'

I held on to him fondly, and felt so excessively sentimental that I could have shed tears.

'If you have any commands, captain, if you have any last injunctions, any dear ones you would like me to wait upon, any sealed packets, pieces of hair——'

'Thank you : if I fall my lawyer will know what to do,' he answered, with his face as grave as a judge's, and in a most serious tone of voice. 'Being alone in the world is thought a poor look-out by many people, and mothers with marriageable daughters will paint the horrors of celibacy in lively colours. But loneliness confers some fine privileges, and at

this moment I would not be a married man if my wife were Venus, and Plutus had made his will in her favour.'

'And yet it must be a pleasant thing to have a wife, sir; to feel that there is always a plump little goddess with grey eyes and soft lips sitting at home and thinking of you—to be the owner of a girl like Madeline Palmer for instance, or such a beauty as that romantic young Italian girl you once told me about—little Peacock's mother, captain, you know—eh? Pray describe her to me, sir. I am in the mood to talk about pretty women.'

'Come along, come along!' he exclaimed rather sternly and very impatiently, nipping my wrist as though he held it in a vice under his arm, and making my legs feel like corkscrews as he hauled me over the ground. 'It will be eight o'clock before we get aboard at this rate. I am sorry I did not accept my friend's offer of a lift in his carriage—but he had left before I was *called out*.'

The length and impetuosity of his stride effectually silenced me, and we walked as if

for a wager. The sun had risen, and such a morning had broken as would have made a man in love with a saunter along the country road we had taken in order to fetch the place opposite which the *Tigress* was anchored, by the shortest cut. After the heated rooms, the revolving dances, the champagne and the flirting, the smell of the hay, the sweet scents of the wild flowers, the breath of the full-leaved hedges, were refreshing beyond all expression. However, the hard walking cleared my head, and by the time we had reached Bottlenose Point (I think it was) I was collected enough to regret the nonsense I had talked to Shelvocke.

Right opposite to us lay the schooner, calmly resting upon the blue water that reflected her beautiful form, and gave back the lustrous sheen of her copper. Shelvocke hailed her, and was immediately answered by Tapping, and in a few moments a boat was lowered.

The Sound was a beautiful picture with its verdant shores, and a group of motionless ships at anchor in Jennycliff Bay, and a few

small creeping white-winged vessels taking advantage of the land-breeze that was making the water tremble towards the sea, though where we stood scarcely a blurr tarnished the blue mirror ; whilst, on our right, we could see the mast-heads of the ships and the grouped town of Plymouth and the hills to the north of it, and Catwater sparkling like quicksilver as it rounded to the eastward past Catdown ; whilst the whole glittering scene of still, blue water, and green and brown land, and ships with their tall masts trembling in the faint haze that the sun was drawing from the shores, was made singularly impressive by the night-silence which the young morning had not yet broken, and by the lifelessness of the silver-bright and beautiful picture which the crawling sails on the water away towards the sea, or the cry of some hidden workman hailing a fellow-labourer, or the striking of a ship's bell, seemed rather to heighten than disturb.

The water buzzed under the stem of the gig as she swept towards us, and in a few minutes we were aboard the schooner. Shel-

vocke was somewhat grave, otherwise his usual manner was unchanged. He ordered the gig to remain alongside ; and after giving a few instructions to Tapping respecting the preparations for sailing shortly after noon, he went below and remained in his cabin until it was time to be off.

A plunge over the side and a twenty minutes' swim completed the cure that my sharp walk with the captain had commenced in me. I drank a cup of tea, and, pipe in mouth, waited for Shelvocke's summons to start. I was depressed ; for I thought it a monstrous pity that the life of a man like Shelvocke should be risked in a pitiful and inglorious encounter with a person whose surly reply to our hail from the deck of his frigate might very well have been passed by with contemptuous indifference. However, regrets were of no use ; and, at twenty minutes to seven, Shelvocke came on deck, with his pistol-case concealed under a light cloak, we jumped into the gig, and started for the place of meeting.

The men looked inquisitively from Shel-

vocke to his cloak that lay beside him, as though they suspected his errand, and I was heartily glad to see no signs of a man-of-war's boat in waiting upon Captain Monk ; for, owing to the press-gangs which (now that the war with America had added to our numerous engagements of a similar nature) were bearing with heavy severity on merchant-seamen, an epaulet in the eyes of mercantile Jack was as bad as a crime in its wearer, and collisions between the crews of merchant ships and naval vessels were repeatedly occurring, and often with lamentable consequences. However, as I have said, nothing resembling a boat was to be seen in the neighbourhood of the spot towards which we were heading. The distance altogether was two miles, and given any other errand, the row would have been a delightful one.

My recollection of Plymouth has been greatly dulled by time, yet I did then, and do still, think the view of the Sound—the town, the forts and heights down as far as the eye could reach, to Staddon Point, ay, and

even to Reny Point, and the hilly shores of Penlee opening, as we rowed, far away behind Drake's Island—the most romantic and beautiful bit of coast scenery mortal eye could wish to look upon, even low on the water as I was, when I turned my head and looked over the stern towards the slip of Cornwall promontory, upon whose green and yellow fields the soaring sun was pouring his lustrous silver.

‘There's a flag-staff,’ said Shelvocke.

‘And there's a man,’ said I, pointing to a figure that was walking by the margin of the water under cover of a tall bank.

‘Monk's second, I suppose,’ said Shelvocke, looking at his watch. ‘He is punctual enough; it wants ten minutes to the hour.’

The oars creaked and the boat flew along; every stroke enlarged and sharpened the figure of the man. Presently we could distinguish his face, and see the buttons glittering on his coat. He stood watching us, and as we approached, raised his hat and pointed to a ledge of soil or sand that jutted into the water, as much as to say, ‘You had better

land here.' The stem of the boat grounded, she swung to the ledge, and we stepped out.

I put the pistol-case under my arm, and wondered how far a distance we should be taken by the naval officer, who had the look of a free and hearty, yet well-bred man, when, again raising his hat, he requested me to step aside with him. I did so at once, leaving Shelvocke standing with his back towards us, and rolling a cigar between his thumb and forefinger, as if considering whether he should light it.

'I am much concerned, sir,' said the officer, 'that it was out of my power to save Captain Shelvocke and yourself from undertaking a fruitless journey. The fact is, on my arrival at the house where Captain Monk is staying, I found that he had been struck down by an apoplexy. There were two doctors in attendance on him. Of course, his presence here is impossible.'

I made him a bow, and walked over to Shelvocke, and gave him this message. The expression on his face did not alter in the

least. He approached the officer with a cold inclination of the head.

‘Unhappily,’ said he, ‘I sail to-day, and cannot possibly fix or suggest a time for another meeting should your friend recover. But if you will favour me with Captain Monk’s address, I will take care that he be kept furnished with such accounts of my movements as the owner of the *Tigress* will receive from me; and you may tell him that I shall be willing to fight him at the earliest possible opportunity that may offer, in any part of the world, with any weapon he likes to name, and at any hour in the whole circle of the twenty-four he may take it into his head to fancy.’

The officer—I forget his name—replied with a haughty bow; the half-suppressed contempt and chilling deliberateness of Shelvocke’s manner and voice were a behaviour in a privateersman which our naval friend did not at all relish. But there was nothing in Shelvocke’s language that he could resent. He named a place at which Captain Monk could be addressed, and added :

‘I will deliver your message, sir, and you may rely upon it that nothing short of an apoplexy will cause Captain Monk to disappoint you when the opportunity for another meeting *does* occur.’


I had some difficulty to keep my face when he said ‘nothing short of an apoplexy,’—as if there were no other illnesses calculated to stop a man from fighting a duel. We again saluted one another, and there being nothing more to say, he walked in the direction of the town and we returned to the gig.

‘Shove off, my lads ; give way now,’ said Shelvocke ; and turning to me as he lighted a cigar, he exclaimed with a quiet smile, ‘I shall be able to smoke this out, after all !’



CHAPTER III.

TO THE WEST.

 HE chimes of the church-clocks striking the hour of noon came down upon the pleasant north-east wind ; and as the ship's bells clanked out the time, it was like the tinkling you hear among flocks of sheep. The piercing pipe of the boatswain summoned all hands to get the schooner under weigh ; a strong gang manned the capstan ; some were aloft loosing the square canvas, others out on the bowsprit and jib-booms, and groups at the running rigging.

With ninety men and a small ship there was no excuse for the least want of smartness ; besides, we lay full in sight of

Plymouth, and the shores all along were alive with critical naval eyes, the mere notion of which nerved our seamen into uncommon dexterous activity. The main throat-halliards were taken through a snatch-block hitched to an eye-bolt abreast of the tiller, so as to give the fellows who manned them the whole run of the deck ; there were hands by the top-sail, stay-sail, and jib-halliards ; twenty men had the handling of the square rigging, and so soon as ever the cable was up and down, the boatswain chirped his pipe, the beautiful schooner flashed as if by magic into a broad tall surface of white canvas, another turn of the capstan raised the anchor, and the *Tigress* was under weigh.

I strode about apparently full of business, singing out here, shouting there, but all the time I was thinking of a green and beautiful estate away beyond the red tiles and church tops, and of the sweet and graceful girl who had stood with me in those same grounds last night and watched the fireworks. I cannot express the gloom that dropped upon me as I looked again and again at the diminishing

town and the country that opened behind it as we drew away, and thought that it was a thousand to one if ever I met Miss Palmer again, and wondered how long a time would elapse before I should gaze once more upon this noble space of blue and golden scenery, the recollection of which in my heart would be eternally associated with the cordial, melodious, sweet-eyed Madeline.

Which of those three vessels in Cawsand Bay was *her* ship? I wondered. They were all West Indiamen. In truth, sentiment was making a perfect fool of me. I felt that I should have been quite content to become Madeline's ship's figurehead for the whole voyage to Jamaica merely for the happiness of being in the vessel she was aboard of. The duel, or rather the programme of it, had given my mind so much occupation that my sentiment had fallen into a mere smouldering condition; but it was forking up into a blaze now that there was nothing particular to distract my thoughts from the contemplation of the girl I might never see again.

Long before we were abreast of Cawsand

the ropes had been coiled down and the decks cleared, and a number of seamen (like myself) were leaning over the bulwarks watching the passing shores, or gazing moodily, with their faces turned towards Plymouth, where they too, in all probability, had been enjoying some ardent flirtations, though I dare say their memory was busier with the grog-shops than with the Sukeys and Salls who had sat on their knees.

‘What are those vessels—West Indiamen?’ said Shelvocke, coming to my side and pointing to the three ships in the bay.

‘I think they are, sir. Miss Palmer told me that the ship she was to sail in for the West Indies had arrived off Cawsand, and I suppose the three yonder are to make part of a convoy.’

He pulled out his watch with a very grave face, and holding it in his hand, asked me if I knew the hour when Lady Tempest’s ball broke up.

‘About four o’clock, sir,’ I answered, wondering at his discursiveness.

‘Say five-and-twenty mintues past four,

Madison,' said he ; 'and that will make it exactly eight hours since you bade good-bye to your pretty partner. Is it possible,' he added, pocketing his watch, 'that you remember her after all these hours ?'

'My dear sir——' I expostulated.

'Madison,' said he, 'you're a wonder! What—a sailor remember a girl eight hours after he has left her! Why, man, do you know what you are doing? You are revolutionising our choicest professional traditions. You will be leaving the Dibdinites nothing to rhyme about, and driving poor Ben Incledon, a man who has never injured you, off the stage! Lord help us, Madison! turn your quid and get rid of this long-shore swash, or you'll be writing verses before you know where you are.'

'I'll tell you what it is, captain,' said I, manfully : 'you didn't dance with her, sir—you didn't see the sparkling of the fireworks in her eyes—you didn't take a moonlight stroll with her among the flowers. Must a night's rout end in battle, murder, and sudden death? Is duelling to take the place

of dancing? When a man is asked to a ball, must he limit his enjoyments to the tweaking of surly naval captains' noses? Give me a beautiful companion, I say. Give me, in preference to arguments on naval manœuvring, impassioned murmurs up in a corner, white shoulders before epaulets, and a moonlit trance among lilies and roses before the cutting civilities of a conversation with a bloodthirsty second!

‘That will do, Madison. Rest your fame as a speaker of the highest order upon that, and say no more. But, doubt my good nature as much as you please, I do now freely admit that I *did* snatch a horrid enjoyment from the browbeating I gave the surly Monk. That we shall fight yet, I do not doubt, unless another fit of apoplexy comes between us. It is high time that we merchantmen vindicated our titles as gentlemen and seamen from the contemptuous usage every little snobling in blue cloth and bright buttons thinks himself privileged to give us. When there is a storm, cannot we meet it? When we are in danger, cannot we brave it? When we are confronted

by an enemy, do we wince ? Is not the mercantile officer as good a seaman as his cocked-hat despiser ? Is not he sometimes a handsome man and a fine fellow ? Play to him, will he not dance ? Pipe to him, will he not pull and haul ? Is not he beloved of sweet woman ? Rogues ! if you say we are not like you in the rest, we will resemble you in that.'

‘ Worthy of Kemble !’

We were soon clear of Rame Head, with the blue waters of the English Channel stretching before us, and after our three weeks’ spell of the ground-tackle, it was almost strange to feel the heave of the sea under our feet. It was a pleasant day, the wind cooled the sunbeams, and overhead was the finest sky I ever beheld ; the high clouds lay in fine white veins—portions resembled lace—from east to west stretched this lovely exhibition of vapour ; indeed, it was like looking up at a dome of marble. The blue lay with a lovely softness of colour amid this vaporous spray ; and when I called Shelvocke’s atten-

tion to the beautiful appearance, he was so much struck that he stood gazing like a man before a picture.

By dinner-time we had run the coast into a mere shadow. The men had been mustered and divided into watches, and our sea-life was fairly commenced.

‘After all, gentlemen!’ exclaimed Shelvocke, addressing Chestree, and myself, and young Peacock (who had been asked to dinner), as we took our places at the table—which the steward had equipped with flowers, and which was as radiant as a looking-glass with the flashing of the sun’s rays through the skylight upon the plate and glass, and purple and yellow wines in decanters—‘there is more real happiness to be got at sea by the poorest sailor, than can be purchased ashore by the wealthiest lord. Madison, a little of this soup? First of all, there are no women to tease him. His sleep is never broken by the cries of a baby. There is no post. There are no tradesmen to vex him with their trifling accounts. Steward, some bread for Mr. Peacock. Money is of no use at sea. There

are no shops—there is nothing to buy. Then again, there are no troublesome next-door neighbours. And best of all, there is no news.'

'And a man needn't shave unless he pleases,' said Chestree.

'And besides, sir, where are you going to get this beautiful buoyant, up-and-down feeling ashore?' exclaimed Peacock, half closing one of his handsome eyes, and looking with the other through a glass of sherry at Shelvocke. 'I never seem to walk comfortably on dry land. There is no spring in the earth.'

'Try dancing,' said I.

'Even then it's like having your boots soled with lead, sir.'

'Give me dry land,' observed I. 'The sea is very well ; but put me where I can humour my artless fancies, gentlemen. I will at this moment pawn all the privileges the captain's prodigal and beneficent sea yields the humble sailor for a cottage and an acre of land—just out of Plymouth ; a cow ; enough hens to give me as many eggs as will garnish two

rashers of bacon of mine own curing, and make me every day a pudding; a ten-ton yacht to scour the Sound, and——' the rest was lost in an irrepressible gape, for which I immediately apologised. 'We have neither of us been in bed, you know, captain, since the night before last.'

Here Tapping's head darkened the skylight.

'There's a sail right ahead, sir, coming down upon us.'

'All right, Mr. Tapping. Get your colours ready for hoisting,' said Shelvocke. 'Madison, your yawn interrupted your sylvan discourse: your cottage and your cows and your hens are very well, but who's going to cook your bacon and make your puddings?'

'A proper little maid, sir; wages ten pounds a year, and cold meat on Sundays to enable her to go to chapel,' I replied, perfectly understanding the twinkle in his eye.

'Mr. Chestree, try a glass of that port,' said Shelvocke, who was in high spirits. 'Pray, my friend—forgive my inquisitiveness—were you ever in love?'

The second mate's face looked like the rising moon on a hot summer night, as he answered in a sort of cracked voice that made Peacock burst into a laugh, 'Once, sir.'

'Only once!—surely you forget?'

'No, sir; on my honour, only once,' repeated Chestree with great gravity.

'Did you marry her, Mr. Chestree?' I asked.

'No, Mr. Madison,' answered Chestree, who was an extremely literal person, and the most accurate man in his statements that ever I met; 'I didn't fall in love with her with the intention of getting married, but for the sake of having somebody to keep company with when I was ashore.'

'That was a very unsettled view of life on your part, Mr. Chestree,' said Shelvocke.

'Had she a mother?'

'No, sir; she hadn't a mother, but she had a father. I lodged in his house, and that was how I got acquainted with the girl. He was a wooden-legged man, and very often in liquor. He lived in Limehouse, sir, and kept a toy-shop. When he was drunk, his

behaviour was extraordinary. Imagine, sir—it was his habit, when he got intoxicated of a night, to go into his shop and wind up all the spring toys and set them running about the floor. He dealt largely in that kind of goods. He would fling the india-rubber balls and dolls against the walls, set the tops spinning, wag the babies' rattles; in fact, he'd start everything that made a noise, sir—cursing and swearing himself all the time at the top of his voice, and rolling among the hoops, boxes of soldiers, and the tambourines. The louder I'd knock overhead, the more things he'd set going. I put up with him as long as I could for the girl's sake, but I was driven away at last; and you'll hardly believe me, Mr. Madison, when I say that the moment I shifted my lodgings the trollop passed me in the street as though I had been a mile-post.'

'A rent in the affections,' said I.

'A week's rent,' exclaimed Shelvocke. 'A fine commentary on tearing a passion into tatters.'

'She came to tatters at last, sir, I believe,'

said Chestree ; ' for her father destroyed so many of his toys that at last he had nothing to sell. They locked him up for debt, and Susan went to——' He checked himself, drained his wine-glass, and stared at Peacock.

' Pray Captain Shelvocke,' said I, smothering another yawn, ' might I be so bold as to ask where the *Tigress* is bound to ?'

' Certainly. I intend skirting the French coast as far as d'Oléron, and then head for the West Indies. But how is it possible for privateersmen to have a programme ? To-morrow may see us burnt, or sunk, or captured, or—a livelier fancy—convoying a noble prize back to that very Plymouth you, Madison, are fretting over. By the way, did not I understand you to say that Miss Palmer is going to Jamaica ?'

' Yes,' said I, blushing a little in anticipation of some banter.

' And did not you endeavour to dissuade her by a picture, such as your active and amorous genius should very well know how to paint, of that hobgoblin the Yellow Jack,

the Jamaica Charon, the fogleman of the noisome battalion of snakes, mosquitoes, bats, bloodsuckers of many kinds, sharks, guanos, negroes, and Yankee skippers? But no matter. Fill your glass—and you and I, as eye-witnesses of her beauty, will privately and in elegant silence toast her. That she and you may meet again I ought not to hope: the feelings of a friend should prompt the heart to kinder aspirations; but still, here's to your wish, Madison—as the good old song says:

“Here's to your wish! let it run as it will, boy!
Bad it *can't* be as it makes us both fill, boy!”

Honest Chestree stared at all this, for neither he nor I had ever seen Shelvocke in such good spirits. No doubt the excitement of the night, the release from an engagement which the braver a man is the gladder he will be to get easily and honourably quit of, and the glee which the prospects of a new cruise raised in him, caused his present overflow. Be this as it may, I never liked him in any mood better than in this. His freedom gave

no offence. The kindness that underlay his joking was always apparent, and the worst-tempered wretch that an enlarged spleen and a congested liver ever exacerbated would have been soothed into blandness by Shelvocke's hearty ringing laugh.

Tapping's pugnacious face again darkened the skylight.

'Please, sir, the fellow ahead is a line-of-battle-ship. She's either lost or struck her top-gallant masts.'

'How far distant is she?'

'About three miles.'

'All right, Mr. Tapping; I'll come and look at her presently. What a very odd language sailors talk, Mr. Chestree. Did you hear Tapping speak of the *fellow* ahead, and then call him *she*?'

'Well, sir, now that you call attention to the contradiction, I see it, captain. But what is a man to say? They corrupted the sex of ships when they called Government vessels men-of-war. You might as well christen a baby-girl Bill.'

'Very true, Mr. Chestree. Gentlemen, if

you have finished your wine, we will go on deck.'

I was excessively sleepy, and the *Tigress's* sherry had not lightened my eyelids. However, I thought I would take a squint at the liner before lying down, and followed the others on deck. The breeze had slackened somewhat, and the schooner was slipping through the water with the quick, sinister, piratical, and sneaking motion that was one of her distinctest qualities. The sail was right ahead, and looked like a wreck under her double-reefed topsails, and thick top-mast-heads.

She was a very large line-of-battle ship, with three tiers of ports, the lower ones of which were closed; and our impression was that she had been partially dismantled by a gale of wind, until she was near enough to show a whole constellation of shot-holes in her bulwarks, her yards and masts fished in numerous places, her lower rigging knotted, and many other signs of a recent severe engagement. The most noticeable thing about her was the streams of bright water

spouting from her sides, and trailing their lines of foam upon the sea as she went slowly, and wearily, and heavily forward.

I once witnessed a prize-fight, and watched two muscular savages pound each other for an hour and a quarter. It was a disgusting sight; but no part of the ferocious and unnatural exhibition impressed me more than the appearance of the victor after his blue, and blind, and bleeding opponent had been carried away. The skin of the conqueror's face was in rags, one eye was hermetically sealed, one arm broken: nevertheless, he made shift to flourish a large white and red pocket-handkerchief; and with a hoarse, spluttering cheer in his throat, the wretched creature staggered round the platform to let his backers see how gamely he endured his punishment.

The recollection of this maimed and heroic—brutally heroic, no doubt, but still heroic—figure was in my mind as I watched the battered, splintered, leaking, patched-up line-of-battle ship go past us, with English colours at the peak, and the water rushing from her scupper-holes under the action of the pumps

like the gutters of a house after a thunder-shower. She appealed to us as a human being might : it was the courage of the broken and mutilated prize-fighter waving his handkerchief, and limping to his home ; but how ennobled the picture by the character of the tremendous struggle that had driven this sinking and injured ship to the refuge of her own ports ! We lowered our ensign, and in obedience to a signal from Shelvocke, every seaman on deck sprang into the rigging, and gave the ship three hurricane cheers. An officer with his arm in a sling responded by raising his hat, but no other notice was taken of us.

‘Is she one of the Channel squadron, I wonder?’ said Shelvocke, watching her with great interest. ‘If so, there has probably been a general engagement, perhaps off Finisterre, where our fleet were last heard of. Mark how she lifts to the swell ! Saw you ever such sickly rolling before ? She must be half full of water, and it is strange there is no tender in company. I would not under-

take to navigate a vessel in that condition twenty leagues.

Her rolling was made all the more impressive by the swell being very light ; she swayed to and fro like a round-bottom vessel, that, being depressed on one side, continues its oscillations for a long time in the smoothest water. I stood watching her until she was a long way astern, and then went to my cabin and slept for four hours like a top.

And now for the space of a fortnight not a single adventure of any kind befell us. It seemed as if all the luck that was to attend the *Tigress* had been squeezed into the first few days of her cruise, and that nothing more was to happen. We sailed along the coast of France, as close in as we dared venture, and on one occasion were so well inshore—this was off the Pointe de Penmarch—that we could see a number of soldiers and villagers looking at us from the top of the cliffs, and a French man-of-war at anchor in the bay that opens the river upon or near which the town of Quimper is situated.

Indeed, our audacity grew with our disappointments, and I have often thought over the hundred chances we gave the enemy of capturing us. The truth was, the numerous reverses that France had suffered at sea had almost emptied the ocean of her merchantmen. I believe half the privateers would have given up this year had we been concerned in no other than the French war. Two-thirds and perhaps more of the merchandise of France were being carried in neutral bottoms, and, as Shelvocke had all along said, referring of course exclusively to France, the only chances which the English Channel offered to privateers were recaptures like the *Hanover*, or the inglorious sport of hunting down small craft like the lugger we chased and sank between Dunkirk and the Goodwins.

At last came a morning when Shelvocke's patience gave way. The Vendée coast was a clear green, and brown, and white-streaked outline on our port-beam; a fresh breeze was blowing over our port-quarter, and the schooner was chopping slowly through the surges which ran away ahead of us in bur-

nished surfaces a short distance before they broke into sheets of sparkling foam, under her mainsail and jib only.

‘Look around you, Madison,’ exclaimed Shelvocke; ‘was there ever such a wilderness! There is not a sixpenny bit to be found in these seas. Will any man believe that this schooner has been coasting the best-armed of the French seaboard without encountering a single vessel of any kind or description?’

‘Ay, and without provoking a single Government ship to come out and have a closer look at her.’

‘Where are the English blockaders, I wonder? where is the Channel squadron? A month ago I know that the offing for leagues swarmed with our cruisers. Has peace been signed? Why, this is worse than Churchill’s Scotchmen feeding

“Like half-starved spiders upon half-starved flies.”

There is not even cold porridge for us here.’

He shaded his eyes with his hands, and bent a steady, scrutinising look upon the

French coast and away around upon the sea-line.

‘Not even a fishing-smack,’ he said. ‘And the men are spoiling. All their old merchant-service instincts are budding upon them like funguses upon trees. They’ll lose their taste for fighting if this lasts, and will forget how to load a gun. See their idle, sprawling postures, like the boatmen of a fashionable watering-place.’

He made a few quick turns along the deck.

‘I have had enough of it,’ he exclaimed. ‘It’s time to give the Yankees a turn. So get all sail made, Mr. Madison. Helm there! let her go round, and keep her at south-west!’

‘Make sail, the watch!’ I shouted. ‘Crack on all, men! Jump aloft and loose the square canvas—every stitch of it!’

In a moment all was bustle. The great main-sail jibed as the schooner swept round on the port-tack; the froth spat and buzzed alongside: as cloth after cloth was extended to the strong breeze, the slope of the deck

grew a sharper angle. Presently the schooner was a lofty, broad, and beautifully symmetrical surface of canvas, the little snow-white sky-sail topping the great column of canvas forward, the jibs curving from the jib-booms, the main-boom over the quarter. The rush of the vessel was felt in the thrilling of the deck, and with a mile of silver-bright wake astern of her, and the smoke and flashing of spray across the forecastle, the *Tigress* fled across the heaving waters of the Bay of Biscay for the great Atlantic deep beyond.


‘Where away now in such a hurry, sir?’ asked Tapping.

‘For the West Indies—the latitudes of rich freights, man!’ I answered; and in a few minutes the news that we were bound for a long stretch of salt water was all over the schooner.



CHAPTER IV.

THE STORM-FIEND.

 HE morning of the first of September broke with a lowering and gloomy sky. We had left the coast of France a long distance astern of us, but from a privateersman's wish to make a beam-wind of the north-east trades when we should have run into them, and with the hope of netting one of the numerous contraband Guineamen crossing the Atlantic for the Spanish Main, or some of the French Indiamen homeward bound, Shelvocke had made a much more southerly course than was necessary for the run to the West Indies.

All through the night it had been so sultry as to drive the men out of their hammocks

under the decks, and force them to take their rest alongside the guns and under the boats, where they were kept rather uncomfortably cool by the showers of dew which fell from the sails, and by the humidity of the air that whitened the rigging and the fife-rails and every other part of the vessel where the damp lodged in lines, with millions of crystal globules which streamed away in water on being touched.

I was on deck when the sun rose, and could scarcely credit that the bleared, rayless, reddish disc that was hove out of the broken and swelling deep was the familiar day-luminary. The sea was a dark, sallow-green heaving plain, of this one gloomy and ugly colour on all sides, not a break of froth to relieve the menacing monotony of its stormy and chafing aspect. The sky was a mere space of leaden-grey, like the sea, unbroken by a single point of light or relieved by the shadow of darker clouds ; in a corner of which hung the newly-risen sun, like a reddish ground-glass globe over a dull argand, shedding a trickling reflection, as pale as the

light of a crescent November moon, on the sickly green swell beneath it. There was a small draught of wind blowing from the east, but every roll of the schooner shook the current of air out of the sails, and the tumbling was sometimes so furious that we had to hold on with our hands to save ourselves from being dashed from one side of the deck to the other. The water burst through the scupper-holes in smoke, and poured through the hawse-holes as the vessel pitched, and washed high as the keel of the gig over the stern. One moment you could have touched the water over the taffrail, the next it was like looking down from the top of a mountain. Men who had been to sea all their lives, and to whom a jumping deck offered a securer footing than the steadiness of the land, went sprawling in all directions, the moment they let go with their hands.

I had noticed Tapping uncommonly pale, but could not conceive the cause until the *Tigress* giving a curtsey that dished a green sea over the forecastle, and sent a number of fellows racing aft, rolling and blowing, and

laughing, and shaking themselves, as they rushed floundering into the waist, I was amazed to see my friend dart to the lee bulwarks, giving me, as he ran, a most woe-begone glance with his bilious, bloodshot eyes, over which he hung as sick as a Frenchman, and like a Frenchman, groaning and convulsing his body, and taking a squint along the deck, first on one side, and then on the other, every time he sacrificed, to see if anybody was watching him.

The strain aloft, however, was getting rather more than I thought good ; so I ordered the main top-mast to be struck, and not having great confidence in our new hemp, I had the lower rigging swiftered ; the main-sail was then lowered, as it was of no use, and bade fair to chafe to pieces, and the schooner was left to tumble about under her jib and gaff-fore-sail.

And, indeed, it was the most uncomfortable experience of the kind she had yet given us. Tapping was not the only man she had nauseated. The cook was too sick to attend to his duty, and the only thing hot we were

promised for the cabin breakfast was coffee ; but even this small luxury was denied us by the cook falling head over heels down the companion-ladder with the coffee-pot in his hand. So we had to make out a meal with cold grog and a piece of salted brisket, and a mighty unpleasant meal it was. The ledge of the table saved the plates from sliding on to the deck, but there was nothing to prevent the contents of one's plate from rolling into one's lap ; and after forking up for a fifth time a piece of beef from between my knees, I begged Shelvocke to excuse me from using a knife and fork any longer, and finished the meal with a bit of beef in one hand, and a biscuit in the other.

‘ Now,’ said I, as Chestree crawled from under the table with the mustard-pot, that had fetched away down his legs on to the cabin floor, decorating his unmentionables in its passage with a very tidy streak, as you may believe, ‘ will any gentleman sneer at the preference I ventured to express at this same table some time ago, for a garden and a cottage ashore, to a heaving, sickening,

muddling, tumbling, however beautifully-constructed, machine like this schooner, that sends Tapping to hang his face over the side, and starts Chestree to crawl upon his knees after the breakfast things ?

‘ I have always looked for a dance of this kind whenever old Neptune took a fancy for a frisk with the beauty whose home is his bosom — there’s a passage in your line, Madison !’ said Shelvocke. ‘ But how can any vessel of this tonnage help rolling with such a top-hamper of iron as grins along our decks ? Go and build a tower atop of your little cottage, and I’ll warrant you the first gale of wind will hoist you out of your bed, and make you hungry for the safety of the sea.’

‘ Do but listen to the groaning of the timbers, captain !’ cried Chestree. ‘ If one will but think of it, sir, man must be a courageous animal to build a hollow ark and sit in the midst of the sea and eat and drink and joke. You would not catch a beast of the field adventuring such an exploit, sir.’

‘Excuse me, Mr. Chestree, there is a large blob of mustard on the front of your shirt. Well, Mr. Madison, how is this going to end? In a gale, do you think?’

‘I do, captain. As you judge of a man’s temper by the expression in his eye, so I look at the sun to observe what sort of a mood nature’s in. That bleared bloodshot orb shows that nature’s in a rage. Feel the panting of her mighty breast under us, sir. Chestree, kindly catch my glass before it capsizes over you.’

‘Where can this abominable swell be coming from?’ exclaimed Shelvocke. ‘Either there must be a tempest close to us or a storm has very recently passed. It’s as bad as one of the lulls off Cape Horn.’

The motion was made more impressive—I had almost written startling—by the uproar it occasioned throughout the vessel, and which we in the cabin could hear to perfection. The swell, as it struck the schooner under the counter, boomed through the hollow fabric as though a thirty-two pounder had been fired under our feet, and one of these

swells hove us up to such a height that every movable article on the table went clattering and jingling away to the foremost end of it, and whilst the three of us swung with our arms round the stanchions like drunken lords to lamp-posts, Shelvocke bawled out :

‘Madison, you can now understand what Gulliver felt when the eagle flew away with the poor little chap’s cage!’

The bulkheads strained as though they must burst asunder ; every timber, every plank, every bolt had something to say on the subject of this crazy, walloping usage, and the small arms rattled like a regiment of charging dragoons in the rack against the foremost partition. Indeed, it was like being rolled down a hill in a barrel into which a bucket of oyster-shells had been flung.

I was not sorry when Shelvocke left the table. However, instead of following him on deck, I entered my berth, as it was my watch below, and I was too old a seabird not to turn in whilst there was a chance of getting some rest, more especially in the face of a storm that threatened us with a long spell of

wakefulness. And, indeed, I do believe that only a sailor or a baby could have slept amid such an uproar of groaning beams and thumping and booming water as filled the cabin. I left my door open ready for the first call, and lay down in my boots ; and in a short time was, I dare say, contributing to the general hullabaloo.

A loud cry sounding through the skylight aroused me. I heard the whistling of the boatswain's pipe and the running about of men. I looked at my watch and found I had been asleep an hour and a quarter ; but it was so dark I had to bring the watch close to my nose before I could read the dial. The motion of the schooner was much less violent than it had been when I lay down, also it was evident to me that there was no wind, though the activity of the watch on deck betokened a change of some sort at hand.

Considering that it was ten o'clock in the morning, the evening gloom that prevailed was not a little ominous and alarming. It was like an eclipse of the sun, and though the watch below had received no summons,

I tumbled out of my bunk and went on deck.

Never before in all my life had I witnessed such a sight as it was now my fortune to behold. Stretched across the whole surface of the sky, lay a dense dark cloud, the malignant bluish hue of which as much resembled a quantity of ink smeared across a sheet of paper with a brush as anything I can imagine to liken it to. But this was only the canvas or ground upon which nature had worked a most terrific piece of cloud tapestry. Right round the horizon was stretched what sailors would call a 'grummet' of sooty vapour—dense, motionless—like some gigantic chimney's outpouring that had settled low upon the sea, and choked out of the heavens the very air that should have scattered it. But in the east there hung, as though poised upon the upper line of this horrible inky circle, layer upon layer of huge clouds, each layer overhanging the other like the scales of old armour, the lower tiers being of a blackness that projected, by the sheer relief of the contrast of hue, the portion of the sooty vapour

upon which they leant their ponderous and dreadful burdens. Under this sky, the awful character of which no pen could express—for what language could convey that *reactive* quality which informed it with its peculiar horror, the awe, the amazement it excited in the mind, the shock that the first sight of it gave to the nerves?—under this sky, I say, the sea lay as dark as you shall have beheld it in the twilight, the horizon swallowed up in the gloom and the haze, so that the schooner appeared to be heaving on a small surface of water in the interior of a globe of cloud.

Such indeed was the darkness that the eye could not follow the run of the swell above half a mile distant from the vessel. Every stitch of canvas had been furled with the exception of the close-reefed gaff-fore-sail, and the men were employed in snugging the decks, hauling taut the running rigging, looking to the gun-lashings, and making every preparation for the coming tempest. I particularly noticed the manner in which they glanced up at the sky and in the direction of the ponderous

cloud-layers. Probably no man among them had ever witnessed such a sight ; and now that no more running about was necessary, their subdued manner, their alarmed faces, their voices toned into awed whispers, exhibited with singular impressiveness the influence of the portentous heavens upon them.

‘ Did anyone ever see such a sight before ? ’ said Shelvocke, who had noticed me the moment I came on deck, and now joined me. ‘ I hope it may not cost us our guns. I thought at first it would end in rain ; but the gathering of that ring, and above all the upheaval of those giant clouds yonder, undeceived me. That black, horizontal circle is a real phenomenon. It has taken a whole hour to gather ; but for the last ten minutes, and even longer, it has not risen, I was going to say, an inch. We are in the centre of a regular belt. I believed it an atmospheric illusion whilst watching it at the beginning. There must have been a swirl of wind to have caused it ; yet for the last hour it has been a dead calm here. ’

‘It has given us time, sir, and we are ready for it. That’s one good job. But it’s enough to quail a man. Do you notice the cowering attitudes of the crew, sir? The worst of this sort of thing is, you never can tell what’s coming.’

‘Imagine a battle like Trafalgar amid this gloom!’ exclaimed Shelvocke. ‘See!’ he added, as a flash of lightning sparked out from the lower strata of the piled-up clouds and glanced a dull blue glare across the sky, ‘there’s the first gun of a bigger engagement than human enemies are ever likely to be concerned in.’

Presently the boom of thunder came down slow and faint. It grew gradually darker and darker; it was impossible to trace the masts to their topmost points; the binnacle-lamp was lighted, and the candle-flame threw a haze upon the air just as it did at night. The watch below had turned out alarmed by this Egyptian darkness, and blackened the decks with their figures as they stood whispering or shuffled uneasily from place to place.

It is bad enough on land to find one's self under a dense thunder-cloud and waiting for the first flash. At sea the suspense is increased out of all comparison by the feeling that one's vessel is, perhaps, the only point upon the ocean for leagues and leagues for the lightning to aim at. When I first went to sea, the ship I was in was becalmed one afternoon in the Bay of Bengal, in company with a small trading vessel. A storm gathered, there was a fierce flash of lightning, almost instantaneously followed by an explosion—the whole air seemed to be filled with live embers—and then came a crash of thunder as though heaven were echoing back the deafening explosion of the country-wallah. Such fatalities are, happily, rare ; but I had witnessed one of them at a time of life when the impressions a man gets are usually deep and lasting, and I viewed with uncomfortable misgivings these sooty, stooping, overburdened masses of vapour, and the early night their shadows had flung upon sea and sky.

‘Is that you, Mr. Madison?’ exclaimed

Shelvocke, who had walked aft and stood near the binnacle.

‘Yes, sir.’

‘Call all hands.’

‘All hands are on deck, sir.’

‘Then get the hatches on, and stand by to let the lee-foremost and aftermost broad-side guns go overboard should the order be necessary.’

These were significant instructions. The hatches were battened, and hands told off to stand by the guns. And now we had not long to wait.

First came the rain ; it plumped down as though a travelling waterfall had taken us on its way. The suddenness and weight of the downpour were astounding, and the noise of the gushing and cascading and sluicing of water was as bad as half-a-dozen great cataracts. A blinding flash of lightning streamed across this water-veil and made hail of it, which pounded and hammered and beat down upon us as though buckets of grape and canister were being emptied on our devoted heads. The roaring of this fall was

scarcely silenced by the peal of thunder that crashed immediately over us, and the lashed sea looked like snow under the fierce and shattering discharge.

This ceased with the same alarming suddenness with which it had begun, and the moment I could squeeze the water out of my eyes and look about me, I saw the wind coming. There was no need to sing out, for every eye was upon it. The sea was like molten lead everywhere but in the east, where the horizon appeared to be lifted into a bluish-white ridge, immediately over which the black clouds were twisting and flying like the rushing and eddying of a ship's wake, or a fierce current full of whirlpools; while to right and left of these tumultuous vaporous masses there was an opening, not indeed of blue sky, but of the sky as it appears when discoloured by a thin body of smoke, through each of which, but for a brief while only, and travelling towards us like the spoke of a revolving wheel, there slanted a sickly, yellow, unearthly-looking sunbeam, the light of which seemed to blast the very water over which

it fled. It was a glimpse, and merely a glimpse, of one of those spectacles of terrific, I had almost said supernatural, grandeur which a man must go to sea to behold. In an instant the tempest had changed the scene into a heaven of flying black vapour and streaming lightning, and an ocean as white as wool, the very swell of which was hurled flat by the fury of the blast, amid which lay the *Tigress*, with the mere shred of gaff-fore-sail she had exhibited in rags, her lee bulwarks under the foam, her lee fore topmast rigging standing in circles like iron half-hoops, motionless upon the level froth; as you might paint a vessel stranded on her bilge on an Arctic plain of snow.

I had posted myself near Shelvocke, in order to receive his instructions, and we stood clinging to the back-stays watching the behaviour of the schooner. What angle her masts made I could not guess ; but I know that for some time the foaming sea to leeward was up to the main-hatch, and the whole of the star-board guns and the bulwarks were out of sight under the water, and the men up to their necks.

And this, be it remembered, with no other canvas exhibited but the rags of the close-reefed gaff-fore-sail.

The helm was jammed hard over, and after an interval the noble little vessel began to pay off, as though, like some creature of instinct, she had been willing to test the strength of her grappling enemy before running. I looked at Shelvocke as the schooner, in wearing, righted, and he shouted, 'Magnificent !' And so it was, for had she been one jot less worthy, the hurricane would have had her on her beam-ends, and her masts along the water with the first blast.

As her jib-booms swept around her decks became level, and with the water up to one's knees gushing overboard from every part of her, and her guns like polished jet with the wet, and huge flakes of spray flying over her stern and ripping through the rigging like a storm of snow, and the men clinging to whatever came to their hands with the conformation of their bodies ribbed and lined upon their soaking garments, the *Tigress* raced like an arrow along the seething surface of

the deep, piling the foam as high as her cat-heads, while the hurricane yelled through her rigging and roared under the pitch-black sky that the lightning was tearing asunder from horizon to horizon.

‘Get a new fore-sail bent,’ cried Shelvocke with his mouth close to my ear, and shouting at the top of his voice, ‘and let us heave the schooner to before the sea rises.’

I went forward to execute his orders, but at every step I took I had to seize hold of a belaying pin, or a coil of rope, or a gun-tackle, to prevent myself from being dashed down upon the deck by the violence of the wind, and so prodigious was the propulsion of the hurricane, that it required my utmost strength to maintain a grasp of the object I seized. It was as though half-a-dozen men were endeavouring to thrust me forward, and by the time I reached the waist I was soaking with perspiration.

With incredible labour a new sail was reefed and bent, and a shred of it hoisted, and the schooner was brought to the wind, and lay with her lee-bulwarks buried, straining upon

a sea that was every moment growing heavier, and almost hidden by the showers of spume which flashed like feathers over her. Meanwhile, the sky had grown a shade or two lighter, there was no more lightning, and the huge layers of clouds which had risen in the east had all gone away to leeward, and lay in a pitch-black pile upon the horizon.

But never had mortal eye beheld a wilder, stormier, gloomier picture of warring winds and waters watched by a more scowling sky, than the scene that we surveyed from the deck of the *Tigress*. The seas had grown into livid coils as high and menacing as the combers which the westerly gales of the Pacific heave in thunder upon the shores of that mighty deep. Far as the eye could reach the ocean resembled a boiling cauldron, and one could follow the huge lifting of the creaming surges against the leaden sky of the horizon. The schooner rode with wonderful buoyancy, with the most expert helmsmen aboard of her at the tiller ; but ease her as they would, from time to time the head of a towering sea would strike her midway be-

tween the gangway and the bows, before she could lift to it, and whole tons of glittering green water would swoop through the rigging and fill the decks with a foamy current which the next heavy *send* to leeward would swirl like a cataract over the bulwark into the raging waves beyond.

I was standing holding on to a rope's end near the aftermost gun, listening to the hooting and roaring of the gale, and watching the frenzied ocean with awe and amazement, and contrasting man's physical littleness with the astounding genius that enabled him to live through, if not to defy, such a furious combination of powers as were now hurling their full and treacherous forces against us, when I was startled by a loud and fearful shout from a group of men who had secured themselves to the main-mast ; and looking in the direction towards which they pointed, I was horrified to observe a large ship with her fore-topsail in rags, heading directly for us at a distance of not more than half a league.

Scarcely had my eye rested on her when another loud cry was raised, and the schooner

soaring at that moment on the summit of a huge sea, I saw to right and left of the approaching ship no less than eight large vessels, some of them close together, all of them tearing furiously before the gale.

‘A convoy!’ roared Shelvocke, who stood close behind me. ‘See! there’s a line-of-battle ship—and look there! and there!’ he pointed first towards the weather-bow, and then towards the weather-quarter, and sure enough at each point the water was studded with rushing ships, some barely visible in the distance, some stretching like clouds of smoke athwart of our hawse and away along the horizon astern. There were sixty or seventy of them; they looked as though the London Docks had fetched away, and the ships in them blown out to sea.

But no one thought of counting them then; no one thought of the wildly picturesque show they made. The great black ship that had been first sighted was swooping down towards us with the velocity of the very hurricane itself. She did not appear to see us, and as we watched her, utterly powerless to help

ourselves, there was not a man who did not reckon that his life was to be counted by the few minutes which would pass before the ship struck us. The horror and danger of the hurricane were forgotten ; we only thought of the ship that threatened to dash into and sink us.

I looked at Shelvocke. His eyes were on the vessel, and by the expression on his face I knew he not only expected the worst, but was ready for it. He had planted himself in one of those set, determined attitudes which resolute men will involuntarily fall into when a great danger is upon them ; his teeth were locked—I could see that by the swell of the temple over the brow—his arms were tightly folded, and his right leg thrown forward.

In truth, there was nothing to be done ; there was no time for the schooner to pay off even had we been willing to meet the certainty of our decks being swept and run the imminent hazard of the vessel foundering under our feet. The approaching ship upon which every eye was bent, and whose coming I watched with suspended breath, dashing

the spray from my eyes as the raging wind hurled it against my face, was fully eight hundred tons in burden, with a high keen stem that divided the water into two hills of foam, each as high as her fore-castle-rail ; and every time her stern sank and her bows were hove up, I could see the copper, streaming with white lacings of spray, down to her forefoot ; and then the whole broad, black, and massive hull would disappear behind a great sea, and nothing be visible but her masts and her long black yards, which swung from side to side as the gale struck the slackly-braced spars first on one yardarm and then on the other, while I could hear the flogging of her torn top-sail sounding like an endless succession of musket-firing ; and in a few moments up she would be hove again, thrown towards the scowling heaven like a little toy upon the summit of a sea, until the whole fabric seemed to be flung out of water, and we looked up at her with white faces as pinioned men would gaze at some nodding rock about to fall upon them from a mountain-top.

Some of the seamen who crowded the waist shrieked ; some of them pulled off their boots and coats ; some watched and waited with stony faces ; some, as I imagined, as if calculating their chances should they leap for her bows.

I turned again to look at Shelvocke ; he tossed his hands with a wild dramatic gesture. The motion instantly sent my eyes towards the ship, and I saw that she had shifted her helm, and that, although she was almost aboard of us, she would clear us.

I sprang on to the bulwark, defying the hurricane, holding on with both arms round a back-stay, and watched her go by. There is no describing in words the impression her passage produced. She was half as lofty again as we, and she swept past our stern like a huge floating tower in a haze of spray and froth, lifting when she was broadside on to our counter, so that we looked up her sides as people on a beach look up a cliff, passing so close to us that she hove half her bow wave over our taffrail, that swept the men at the tiller off their feet, grazing our main-

boom with her fore-channel, and carrying away our peak signal halliards with her cross-jack yardarm. Her decks might have been crowded with people for all we knew, but her bulwarks hid everything, and not a human being was visible. Her gun-ports were closed, her boats slewed inboard, her running-rigging as slack as a watch-guard ; the hooting of the hurricane among the ropes was deafening : but it was just a furious rush and the thing was over ; it was like seeing a cart-load of snow flash from the house-top past the window through which you are looking.

Scarcely had she travelled six times the distance of her own length, when she put her helm down with the intention of heaving to. I got off the bulwarks, and, crouching under their shelter, watched her. She was obviously acting in obedience to a signal from the line-of-battle ship, who had rounded to, and whose example many of the vessels were following, though others, whether from helplessness or fear of broaching to, swept wildly on, and were one after another swallowed up

in the spray and gloom of the near horizon. As her broadside came up to the wind, she lay over to such a degree that I shouted to Shelvocke she was foundering. The enormous seas which were now running swept over her as though she had been a rock. Every time, the surges swung us giddily into the air I could see the hull of her exposed to within a few streaks of her keel. I believe that her cargo had shifted, for her lee lower-yardarms were in the water, and she appeared to have no more buoyancy than a water-logged vessel.

Meanwhile, astern and to windward there was to be seen such a sight as few men have had the fortune to behold. The whole ocean, all that way, was covered by vessels of various rigs and sizes—ships, brigs, snows, tartans, schooners, pinks—hove to, some under storm stay-sails, some under bare poles, some with shreds of canvas streaming from the jack-stays. The line-of-battle ship was astern of us; near her were two large Indiamen; abreast of us was a small frigate, and beyond, a whole squadron of vessels, wildly plunging

upon the foaming seas, some being buried while others were hurled towards the sky, every vessel shrouded from time to time in vast veils of spray, a few of them going to pieces aloft, and two with the English ensign jack down in the rigging. It was enough to scare a man to see all these ships appearing on a sudden amidst a raging surface upon which our schooner was the only visible object a few minutes ago.

‘I never remember a worse hurricane than this,’ cried Shelvocke, squatting alongside of me under the bulwarks, in which position we were not only sheltered from the weather, but could command a windward view through the gun-port near which we crouched, as well as survey the whole scene to leeward. ‘These surely must be the May convoy from China and the East, or what should they be doing here? I fear that some of them are doomed ships.’

‘I thought we should have been the first to go just now, sir.’

‘Ay, there never was a narrower shave.’

Sheltered as we were, yet such was the

hellish hooting through the rigging and the roaring of the tempest through the sky—a sound as distinct from the other as a clap of thunder is from the moaning of wind through a window-casement—that we had to yell out our words to make each other hear ; small wonder, therefore, that we did not talk much. Indeed our thoughts were engrossed in watching the behaviour of the schooner and the movements of the numerous ships which, as if by a stroke of magic, had suddenly crowded the waters around us.

As for the *Tigress*, she rose and fell like a cork, scaling the watery acclivities as a sleeping albatross would, and freeing herself with an alertness that resembled the instinct of that bird from the falls of frothing water which, helped by the wind, ran faster than she could rise, and tumbled like a scattering of thunderbolts over the forward deck.

But the poor ship—she that had nearly run us down ! She lay sheer on her beam-ends with the seas flying over her, as though she were stranded. Whether she was undermanned, or her people were lubbers, or con-

sisted chiefly of Lascars, who at a time like this would, I knew from experience, be skulking and praying in corners, I could not guess: but apparently no efforts were made to right the vessel; the braces were slack, the hurricane had whipped the yards round, and as not only her royal-yards were crossed, but all her sails were very ill-stowed, the pressure aloft must have been enormous.

Presently a man swung himself into the mizzen-rigging, holding a small red ensign. Hardly had he reached the second ratline, when a sea struck the ship just under her mizzen-channel, and ran up to a height of twenty feet in a dark green, sparkling column before the wind dashed it into smoke. The man, clinging to the rigging, and looking more like a soaked rag than a human being, climbed another foot or two, and then attempted to seize the flag with the jack down to one of the shrouds; but he had no sooner secured one corner of the flag than the seizing gave way, the bunting flashed from his hand and was swept towards the clouds, resembling as it went a flash of fire.

‘Why don’t they cut away her masts?’ roared Shelvocke. ‘My God! she can’t last another five minutes in that posture!’

As though the exclamation had been uttered on board the ship herself, he had hardly spoken when several men climbed, evidently with great difficulty, over the slanting, almost horizontal bulwarks, and got into the channels, where they fell to hacking and hewing the laniards of the shrouds and back-stays. A blinding sea smothered the unhappy vessel: at the same moment her fore and mizzen topmasts broke short off under the topsail-yards, and hung with all their complicated hamper down the lower rigging. I looked for the men who had severed the rigging, but only two were struggling over the forward bulwarks, and the *main chains were empty.*

The ship righted a trifle, but not to the extent she should have done, and I was now sure that not only had her cargo shifted, but that she was taking in water fast. It was a sight to sicken the heart to see that she was doomed, to know that she must founder, and

to feel that no help could be given her. It is bad enough to behold a vessel sinking under your guns, even mitigated as the sin of destroying human life is to your conscience at such a time by the intoxication of your triumph. But to witness in cold blood a noble ship struggling with a raging sea, gradually losing her buoyancy until she tosses with the inelastic action of a dead body, settling lower and lower until she suddenly vanishes, amid the ear-splitting yells of the mass of human beings congregated on her decks, is a spectacle calculated to give more anguish to the beholder than any other picture of human suffering.

Except the men who had scrambled into the chains, no living creature had been visible aboard of her, in consequence of her high bulwarks and her tremendous list, that probably huddled her people into the scuppers; but now that she was indubitably sinking, a sudden rush of figures blackened her rail to windward, they clustered like flies along her side, and, in spite of the gloom and the fog of flying spray, the figures of numerous

women were clearly distinguishable. The shrieks of the poor creatures rang through the thunder of the hurricane; we could see their frantic gestures, the passionately lifted arms of the women, the mad beckoning of the men for the help that could not be given. Some scrambled aloft, some in tossing their hands lost their balance, and fell headlong into the sea; the wrecked masts, the yards swaying wildly with every roll and harpooning the lee-side and shrouds of the ship; the crowds of miserable creatures raving and motioning upon the bulwarks of the hull whose staggering movements were like the reeling of a drunken man; the ceaseless pouring of the surges over her in whole acres of green water which broke as they struck her decks, and were swept upwards by the hurricane in clouds of spray, like the steam of water thrown upon a burning house, and the black heavens overhead, under which masses of sand-coloured scud-like cloud were driving with incredible velocity, and the mountainous, seething, roaring waters like ink in contrast with the foam of their breaking

summits, formed such a picture of wild devastation and enormous fury, as not the oldest seaman among us could ever remember hearing or seeing the like of.

She had sunk by this time as deep as the thin white line that ran under the gun-ports, and I was watching with a wildly beating heart and difficult breath the blood-freezing, the dismal, the most dismal spectacle of the crowds of men and women motioning to us, and shrieking in their horror as they stood, so to speak, on the very brink of the tremendous and appalling grave of boiling and roaring waters that was opening under their feet, when a loud shout from Shelvocke caused me to look to windward, where I beheld a monster sea—the Mont Blanc of the liquid Alps around us—a whole league long, as I should imagine, stooping its emerald-green unbroken crest as though fearful of brushing the sky, and rushing at us at the speed of a race-horse in full career. The men had barely time to fling themselves down upon their breasts under the weather bulwarks, when the schooner was on her beam-

ends and running up the watery steep. The sensation was that of being shot by an irresistible power into the air—I mean, that one felt to be disconnected altogether from the schooner, and to be soaring alone through the gale. I never experienced anything like it before nor since. The faculty of thinking was suspended ; one could only hold on with a kind of dull amaze, and listen to the roaring and feel the mighty upheaval and the more terrible sensation of sinking. At one moment, namely, when the schooner had been swept to the summit of this prodigious sea, she seemed to be revolving so as to bring her keel up ; a plummet dropped from the port-rail would have grounded on the starboard-rail ; the deck was up and down like the side of a house ; another instant and she was rushing down into the black and howling valley that was scooped out by this astonishing height of water, with her deck making a perpendicular line with the zenith in the other direction. It was incredible that any fabric made of human hands could have encountered such a wave and lived through it ; yet

such was our fortune, or such the buoyancy of the beautiful vessel, that she did not ship so much as a single drop of water, though assuredly had the gigantic sea *broken* before it reached us, we should have been overwhelmed, and in all probability gone to the bottom like a lump of lead.

I watched it as it rushed towards the ship ; I saw the sodden, helpless hull partially rise, as though making one struggle to let it pass under her. In an instant she was rolled completely over, and her copper bottom gleamed amid the ocean of foam that broke round and about her ; the spray filled the air ; there was just a glimpse of her dark spars lying aslant upon the water ; the monstrous sea, uniting its mountainous green ridge again where it had been divided by the hull of the ship, rolled roaring along the sea, and its gigantic form might have been traced for miles. The great track of snow-white foam left behind was broken up by the hurling surges, which leapt into it like a band of wolves into a sheep-fold. I thought I saw the hull of the ship glancing amid the hollows, but it was

only the outline of a dark wave. The ocean all that way was a blank, and every vestige of the ship and her freight of human lives had vanished.

And now, as though this dreadful sacrifice had partially propitiated the storm-fiend, the heavens in the direction whence the hurricane blew lightened into a pallid sulphur colour, and the horizon opened. But there was no lull in the wind ; on the contrary, it seemed to come with a new edge, a fresh spite. From time to time one of the windward vessels would put her helm up, and under a shred of canvas, rush like an affrighted thing from the tremendous scene of warring sea and dark sky, and vanish upon the waste of hurling waters to leeward in a fog of foam. Most of the large ships had suffered terribly ; one was totally dismasted, and in the most dire peril ; another had only her fore-mast standing ; the line-of-battle ship had lost her fore-topmast and jib-booms. She lay about a quarter of a mile astern of us, and there was something *sublime* in the spectacle of her large hull soaring and vanishing, glancing

through a storm of spray as she was hove up, until she stood nakedly exposed against the leaden sky, poised on the summit of a sea like a ball balanced on a finger, and then sinking until nothing could be seen but her top-masts sloping out of the pea-green ridges heaped about her.

Strangely enough, the little vessels had proved the most weatherly; only one of the eight or nine that I counted appeared to have suffered aloft, and she could scarcely have exceeded eighty tons. It was like watching a wherry. I never should have believed it possible that any vessel could be so flung about and live. Every time she vanished I could have sworn she was gone for good, yet up she would come again as regularly as a buoy.

A little after four bells in the afternoon this hurricane began to slacken its fury; the sooty pall of cloud that was stretched like a carpet across the whole surface of the visible heavens broke up into large masses of vapour with primrose-coloured patches between them, and anon narrow spaces of

watery-blue opened and let down hazy beams of sunshine here and there, which touched the dark surface of the mountainous waters with a troubled yellow brightness. By four o'clock the wind had decreased to a moderate gale, and quantities of smoke-like scud were sweeping under a blue sky marbled with small prismatic oyster-shaped clouds, which were moving slowly and bodily away to the northward, athwart the course of the gale, and through which the windy sun was forcing his ardent beams and giving a beautiful green sparkle to the tumbling seas, and a flashing whiteness to their seething crests.

We hoisted a small English ensign to let the war-vessels know our nationality, and watched the line-of-battle ship repairing damages, and signalling to the convoy like a hen calling around her the survivors of her brood after a hawk has been among them. As for the *Tigress*, she was in the same taut and uninjured condition as the hurricane had found her in ; not a spar was sprained, not a rope had carried away ; there was not an inch of water in the well ; under a close-

reefed fore-sail the noble little craft rose and fell upon the gradually-subsiding seas, as sound in masts and hull as if she had just come out of dock, with the decks whitening in all directions as they were dried by the sun, and the crew busy clearing up, seeing to the guns, swabbing down the scuppers, opening the hatches, and so forth.

I stood with Shelvocke watching the vessels to windward.

‘Madison,’ said he, ‘this will, I fear, prove a memorable gale. I should not like to be prevented from sleeping until I had counted in guineas the value in ships and goods that has gone to the bottom this blessed day.’

‘I would to God, captain,’ said I, ‘I had not seen that ship founder. The yell of her people will ring in my head to my dying day. It is a horrible trial to be obliged to helplessly watch one’s fellow-creatures miserably perish.’

‘It is so ; but is it not monstrous that men who will shudder over such a sight as we have witnessed would, without a single compunctious visiting of remorse, make a holocaust of whole ship-loads of human beings

merely because the ambition of one potentate thwarts or obstructs the ambition of another potentate? We are aghast at an act of God; we are horrified by the visitation of that Being in whose mercy we declare our faith upon our knees; but our own hellish wickedness, our own unnatural, fiendish cruelties we exult over—we crown—we behymn—we monumentalise!

‘My dear sir,’ I exclaimed, much astonished, ‘how, with these sentiments, can you have the heart to command a privateer—a vessel licensed by the authority of one of those potentates you name, whose ambition covers mankind with sin, to destroy, capture, burn, and the rest of it?’

‘Because, young man, being born of woman, I am inconsistent, weak, vain, and insincere,’ he answered. ‘Besides, I am a sailor, and what the dickens have I to do with long-shore moralities? The turn of a spoke just saved our lives when that foundered ship was rushing upon us. What is the use of sentiment to men whose existence depends upon the angle described by a piece

of timber? When that great sea took us, what premium do you suppose an insurance office would have charged you for a policy on your life? Could a diagram of the vessel as she hung on the crest of that Andean wave be submitted to some of your scientific bodies, not a member but would swear that she ought to have upset, and that, instead of taking the liberty to discuss the subject, you and I should be making love to the Atlantic mermaids, some thousands of fathoms deep. Men who go about with a halter round their necks, which at any moment may be hauled taut, can't be bothered with philosophy. I am one of those who go where the devil drives. Sometimes I may try to sneak on a drag. Sometimes I may whip out a bit of morality and expose it as a man might a flag to show that he sails under honourable colours. But the devil keeps hold of the reins all the same; and it is in this fashion that a large number of us are going virtually to hell.'

A flash, followed by a loud report.

'A gun from the liner, sir!' I exclaimed.

‘With whom is she parleying with those flags?’

Presently the frigate that lay abreast of us, but a long way off, replied to the signal. Then came another gun from the big ship, and more signals, which were evidently addressed to the merchantmen, for every vessel that had masts hoisted the answering pennant. The import of these signals was speedily shown by the various ships making sail; and a brave and handsome show they made, as in twos and threes they sheeted home the reefed canvas and came rolling and foaming down towards us upon the swelling surges: the large Indiamen looking like men-of-war with their square yards and tiers of ports, and their lengths of white hammocks, and their tall poops and forecastles crowded with men, and the little craft toppling about like toy brigs and schooners, rolling their gunwales under water as they buzzed along, while the rays of the sun which streamed down in a mass of lateral lines, for all the world like a heavy shower of molten gold, and seemed to veer from one point of the compass to the

other under the swarming of the flying scud, illuminated the various vessels in turns, kindling red fires in their glossy sides, and veining their masts with purple lines, and flashing up their decks like diamonds on a motioning hand, as the brass-work and skylights caught the rays, and making a perfect magic-lantern-show of the windy, tumbling, and foaming scene, by the swift alternation of violet shadows and yellow brilliance.

The line-of-battle ship set her main-top-sail and fore-sail, and advanced towards us with slow, ponderous, and lordly movements, as much as to say, 'I have had my eye upon you, my friend, and take the first opportunity to have a better look at you.' Nor was her curiosity unreasonable; in spite of the small ensign at her peak the *Tigress's* low, long, powerful, and heavily-armed hull, and piratical sweep of spars, were hardly of a kind to reassure a commodore in charge of a rich and numerous convoy.

She approached us within pistol-shot, and was indeed so close that the recoil of a sea from her huge side sent a shower of spray

over our quarter-deck. Groups of officers stood with glasses levelled at us, and gazing at them was like standing in the pit of a theatre and looking up at the gallery. I remember noticing her gigantic cutwater as she ploughed the green seas, curling an immense wave away from her with every plunge of her heavy, enormously thick bows, and the vast spread of her lower shrouds, terminating in tops as big as the floor of a room, and the little figures of the men who looked down at us from these platforms.

I thought they would hail us; but I suppose they reckoned us honest enough, and shifting her helm the huge fabric rolled away from us, in the direction pursued by the merchantmen, leaving the frigate to look after the injured ships.

‘Tis an ill wind that blows nobody any good,’ said Shelvocke, after sweeping the weather horizon with the glass. ‘Yet this hurricane would have been more obliging had it blown up any other convoy than an English one. However, get a reef shaken out of the fore-sail, Mr. Madison, and set the standing


and inner jibs. The course is west sou'-west.'

In half an hour's time we were foaming along on the strong swell left by the hurricane, every vestige of the convoy vanished, a bright sun shining over our starboard bow, and a heaven out of which the smoke-like scud had vanished, leaving instead a sky of brilliant, small white cloud flecked with orange in the west, and blue overhead, and violet in the east, as it arched towards the sea whose tossing surface seemed to have been purified into the most lovely and transparent green by the hurricane that had ravaged it.



CHAPTER V,

A STRANGE VISION.

‘ HAT is all that smoke forward there, Mr. Tapping?’ I sung out as I came on deck, after changing my wet clothes.

‘It’s the cook bothering with some damp wood over the galley fire, sir. I suppose you know the men haven’t had any dinner?’

‘Then that accounts for the odd sensation just here,’ said I, laying my hand on my waistcoat; ‘that has been bewildering me for the last two hours. Why, none of us has dined.’

‘No, sir, and the men are like wolves. It’s a sight to see them sharpening their knives on the soles of their boots. I shouldn’t like

to be the cook if the water don't boil soon, sir.'

I went up to Shelvocke, who was puffing a cigar with a thoughtful face on the grating abaft the tiller, and asked him if he was aware that neither he nor any of the rest of us had tasted food since breakfast—nine dismal hours of abstinence ?

'Upon my word !' he exclaimed, throwing his cigar overboard and jumping up, 'the hurricane must have been strong indeed to blow the very appetite out of a man. Call the steward, Madison.'

The man came on deck.

'What is there to eat, steward ?'

'There's cold beef, sir, and cold 'am, and a piece of pickled pork——'

'No more words,' interrupted Shelvocke. 'Make the best show you can with the cold provender—we can't wait for the cook ; and take my compliments to Mr. Corney and the third and fourth mates, and say I shall be glad to see them to dinner.'

The steward bustled off, and presently we were all pegging away at the substantial and

plentiful sea fare that loaded the table, whilst a boatswain's mate stumped the quarter-deck in charge of the schooner.

But there was a gloom upon some of us that the wine, freely bandied about as it was, could not lighten. I wondered at the depression of my own spirits almost remorsefully, when I recalled the perils we had escaped and glanced up and beheld the mild blue heaven beaming over the skylight, and the golden evening sunshine streaming in rays upon the small-arms rack, and flashing in the musket-barrels and cutlasses.

'You look as glum as a sick monkey, Madison,' exclaimed Shelvocke. 'Are you still haunted by the spectacle of that foundering ship? One would suppose you had a sweetheart aboard of her. And you, Peacock, have you seen a ghost that you sip your wine as solemnly as if you were drinking to the memory of the dead?'

'There's nothing the matter with me, sir,' answered the handsome young fellow, rousing himself apparently with an effort; but the unusually thoughtful and dejected expression

came into his face again a moment after, and he fixed his large dark eyes dreamily upon the table.

‘Captain, what state of mind ought a man to be in after a narrow escape?’ said Corney. ‘Ought he to feel awed, and wonder that such a rascal as he was thought worthy of another chance of mending his life, or take his luck dispassionately and conclude that his escape merely meant that his time hadn’t yet come?’

‘Why, Mr. Corney, that will depend upon whether he’s a Christian or a Mussulman.’

‘But how ought a Christian to feel, captain?’

‘My good sir, do you suppose that Great Britain supports four archbishops—Armagh counts for one, don’t he, Madison?—four archbishops I say, and a whole squadron of dignitaries from London to Sodor and Man, that such a question as yours shall be answered by the skipper of a privateer? Give me ten thousand a year and a palace, and I’ll engage to reply to your inquiries.’

‘What is meant by a narrow escape, I wonder?’ observed Chestree.

‘When the toyman’s daughter jilted you, that was a narrow escape for you or Susan,’ said I, feeling that I ought to say something. ‘You might have married her.’

‘Why, that’s very true, Mr. Madison,’ responded Chestree, gravely. ‘But was that a narrow escape because I *knew* it to be an escape, or would it have been a narrow escape whether I knew of it or *not*?’

‘Good Lord!’ cried Tapping, ‘what *do* you mean, sir?’

‘Pray explain yourself, Chestree,’ exclaimed Shelvocke.

‘As your proposition stands,’ said Corney, ‘it is the most unintelligible thing that has come to my ears since my first schoolmaster asked me if a bee was a fly would a blue-bottle make honey.’

‘Why, really, gentlemen,’ said Chestree, blushing like a girl, after staring at one and the other with his great mouth open like a newly-landed cod, ‘what I said is extremely sensible. What *is* a narrow escape,

I asked ? For instance, here we are sitting in this cabin. At this very moment one of the boys may have wriggled himself into the powder-magazine that is almost under our feet, and be skylarking among the cartridges with a lighted candle. A spark from the candle would blow us into smithereens, but the candle is accidentally extinguished, the boy sneaks away, and no harm is done. Is this a narrow escape, captain ?

‘Of course it is.’

‘Whether we know it or not ?’

‘Certainly. What the deuce has your *knowledge* of the danger got to do with the risk you run ?’

‘But, good heavens, sir,’ pleaded Chestree, ‘at this rate every moment of our existence, more or less, involves a narrow escape. I am sent aloft ; in my hurry I skip a ratline ; had I footed that ratline, I should have tumbled overboard. But I go up and I come down safe, and I know nothing of the risk I have run. Do you mean to call that a narrow escape ?’

‘If by taking that ratline you would have

been thrown overboard, your skipping it would assuredly be a narrow escape.'

'Whether I knew it or not?'

'Certainly,' said Tapping.

Chestree drew a deep breath.

'It's no use, gentlemen: I see you don't understand me.'

'You don't understand yourself,' said Corney, wondering at the blockhead.

'You'll excuse me, Mr. Corney,' replied Chestree, with a wandering eye, 'but I hope you don't think, because I'm not able to amputate a man's leg, that I'm an ass, sir?'

'And I hope you don't imagine, because I *can* amputate a man's leg, that I'm unable to tell when a man talks nonsense, sir?' said Corney.

Shelvocke gave me a faint wink, and glanced at Peacock. I imagined that he was willing to encourage a quarrel between Corney and Chestree, merely that it might awaken Peacock out of his melancholy. At least I knew the real, if furtive, interest he took in the lad, and his glance at him exactly conveyed the impression I have written.

“Nonsense,” is rather a strong term to apply to a man's opinion, Mr. Corney,’ said I.

‘What other word,’ replied Corney, warmly, ‘will describe the reasoning of a person who says, in effect, When I pulled off my coat before going to bed, I found that somebody had chalked “Fool” upon it ; but so far as I was concerned, no such word was on my back until I pulled off my coat and read the word, because I didn’t know it was there?’

‘I think he has you there, Chestree,’ said Shelvocke. ‘That’s a strong argument against Chestree, don’t you think, Madison?’

‘Strong for its impertinence, sir ; but as a piece of reasoning not worth *that !*’ shouted Chestree, with a loud snap of his fingers.

‘Oh, pray don’t talk of impertinence, Mr. Chestree!’ exclaimed Corney, rather hysterically, and cocking his nose in the air, with the nostrils working like a pair of bellows. ‘The man who sneers at a gentleman’s profession isn’t the right kind of individual to speak of impertinence. Impertinence!’ he continued, warming up, with Chestree’s refer-

ence to the amputation of legs evidently rankling; 'why don't Mr. Chestree refute me, captain? My idea of the word "fool"——'

'*Your* idea of the word "fool"! *My* idea of the word "fool," you mean, sir!' shouted Chestree. 'Ask me for a definition of that word, my young friend, and no living artist shall give you a neater portrait of yourself than I will.'

'Gentlemen—gentlemen!' interposed Shelvocke; 'not so personal, please.'

'Captain Shelvocke!' exclaimed Corney, 'I desire, sir, to take this opportunity, in the presence of the commander and officers of this schooner, of stating that in my opinion Mr. Chestree is a man of no origin.'

'Here's a pretty surgeon! here's a fine cutter and carver, gentlemen!' burst out the literal Chestree, with a deafening *neigh* that was meant for a laugh, 'not to know that every human being born into this world *must* have an origin! No origin! Ha! ha! And yet I dare say the fellow thinks himself qualified to argue on anatomy!'

There was no standing this acceptance of

Corney's affront ; the high convulsed features, the dancing eyes, the broad open mouth of the second mate, and the purple countenance and quivering nose of the surgeon, were too much for our gravity. Shelvocke, Tapping and I burst into a roar of laughter, which Chestree joined in to his heart's content, evidently imagining the joke to be on his side.

'Gentlemen,' said Shelvocke, 'we have had enough of this discussion. Now that you are evidently both of one opinion, you will oblige me by drinking each other's health. Mr. Tapping, fill Chestree's glass. Corney, the decanter is at your elbow.'

The apparent good-humour of this request did not make the tone in which it was delivered less imperative ; but the look that the two men gave each other as they grasped their glasses, as if they intended to fling them at one another's heads, started me off again.

Presently Chestree left the table to attend to his duty on deck, and was followed by Peacock. The young fellow had not spoken half-a-dozen words during the whole time we were at dinner.

‘What’s the matter with the boy, Madison?—do you know?’ asked Shelvocke. ‘Is he ill?’

‘I don’t think so, sir. A little capsized, perhaps, by the sight of the sinking ship, as I am—or *was*, I ought perhaps to say.’

‘That is it, no doubt,’ remarked Corney: ‘and an awful thing it was to see. I suppose if Chestree had been asleep when she foundered, he would swear it couldn’t have happened because he knew nothing of it.’

‘Oh, pray don’t get upon that subject again, Mr. Corney,’ said Shelvocke. ‘Do you know, Madison, I think I have made a mistake in coming so far south.’

‘Why, sir, I always thought the contraband Guineamen would give us more trouble than they’re worth, should we succeed in capturing one or two of them,’ I answered. ‘But we are heading now for the Yankee tracks, I take it, and I think the helm has been wisely shifted.’

‘The sea has dropped miraculously, considering the frightful severity of the hurricane.—Mr. Chestree!’ he shouted, sending his

voice through the open skylight, 'how looks the weather?'

'Very fine indeed, sir, and clear as glass in the north. The breeze has shifted three points since I have been on deck, and I reckon it will be failing us altogether at sun-down.'

'Likely enough,' said Shelvocke, emptying his glass, and glancing at the tell-tale compass that swung over his head.

We had more wine and sat chatting awhile, and then Shelvocke got up and went on deck, and I repaired to my cabin, where I lay thinking over the hurricane, and the sinking ship, and Corney's and Chestree's quarrel, and Miss Palmer and Lady Tempest's ball, and many other such matters, until I fell asleep; but was awakened by the excessive heat, that bathed me in perspiration and made the berth like a forcing glass-house in the dog-days.

It was more than I could stand, so I filled my pipe and went on deck.

The sun had set, and though there was a rich red flush in the west, the night—as it

does in these latitudes—had gathered a few minutes after the luminary had vanished, and the effect of this blood-red space upon the darkly-pure heavens in which the large yellow stars were shining like little moons, was extremely beautiful and strange. There was a faint breeze blowing from the south, scarcely enough to steady the sails, and a swell that would have kept the schooner rolling uncomfortably enough but for the unusually long intervals between the watery heavings.

The first person I noticed on arriving on deck was young Peacock, who stood upon one of the guns, leaning over the bulwarks, and looking into the black water alongside. He was so utterly lost in thought that though I remained at his side for some moments he had no knowledge of my presence, and when I addressed him he started so violently that the light straw hat he wore fell from his head into the sea.

Trivial as this incident was, I cannot express the effect it produced on me.

‘It’s gone for good,’ said I, watching the pale circumference glide astern, ‘and you’ll

never wear that hat again this side of the promised land. What caused you to jump so wildly ?

‘Your voice startled me, sir.’

‘Go fetch another covering,’ said I ; ‘the dew falls like rain.’

He went below and presently returned, and stationed himself alongside the gun on which he had been standing.

‘Aren’t you well, Peacock ?’

‘Quite well, sir,’ he replied, a little irritably ; ‘what makes you think I am not well, Mr. Madison ?’

‘Because you are so extremely glum, my boy. Nothing has annoyed you, I hope,’ said I, thinking of Shelvocke’s story about him, and wondering whether Chestree or Tapping had said anything to pain him.

‘No, sir. A fellow cannot always control his feelings. I have felt dull—I shall wake up presently.’

‘What should make a lad like you *dull* ?’ I exclaimed, rather disposed to think him sentimental—a weakness that is bad enough in men, but odious and disgusting in boys.

‘You’re nineteen years old, I think you said; and any man who can be *dull* at that age must be cracked—nothing but a list in his brains ought to excuse him. What were you looking for in the water alongside just now?’

He made no answer. I could not very clearly distinguish his features in the starlight; but I *did* see, and was astonished to behold, his large dark eyes glittering with tears, as he raised them towards the sky, and stood in that posture for some time quite motionless, breathing quickly.

‘What ails ye, Peacock?—tell me, my boy,’ said I, softening my voice and addressing him very earnestly.

He suddenly threw his arm along the fife-rail, and buried his face in it and sobbed like a girl, yet very quietly; indeed so gently, that had I stepped back a pace I had not heard him.

‘A touch of hysteria—highly delicate organisation—deplorable sensibility! Poor boy! quite unfit, as I have always felt, for a rough sea-life,’ thought I, watching him and

waiting until his emotion was spent before I addressed him again.

Presently he looked up, and said, 'You see how it is, sir ; I cannot control these moods of mine.'

'Go and ask the steward for a rummer of cold grog,' said I. 'Nothing like a glass of grog to haul taut one's nerve-strings.'

'No, thank you, sir. Give me a little time and I shall be all right.'

However, what with the curiosity my knowledge of his story had aroused in me, and the interest he had all along excited, I was not in the temper to let him go without a little further probing.

'Look here, Peacock,' said I, 'why the deuce won't you answer a plain question? No man sheds tears without a reason. If it's on the nerves, let him get the head-pump rigged and stand under it until he's better ; if it's in the mind, let him unburden himself. What's the matter with you ?'

He folded his arms and tapped on the deck with his little foot.

'What would be the good,' said he, in a

low voice, 'of my telling you, Mr. Madison ? You will only laugh at me.'

'Not I, man.'

'I know you ridicule everything superstitious, sir.'

'How do you know that, my friend ?'

'Mr. Madison, I will tell you the truth if you promise me to keep it secret.'

'Of course it has no relation to what you would very well know to be my duty as chief officer ?'

'Oh dear no, sir.'

'Then, on my honour, I will keep your secret.'

He pulled off the cloth cap he had substituted for the headgear that had gone astern, and wiped his forehead ; but instead of replacing it, he held it in his hand—and there can be no doubt that he did this expressly, as though his story were too solemn for him to relate with his head covered. The starlight was in his eyes as he fixed them upon me, and he spoke in a voice scarcely raised above a whisper, sometimes catching his breath hurriedly like a person in pain.

‘It was in the morning-watch, sir ; half an hour after I had come on deck this morning. It was very thick all around, and black as pitch. The men had stowed themselves away under the boats, and forward the decks looked deserted. Mr. Chestree, who was right aft, told me to bring him a draught of water from the scuttle-butt. It was so dark all about the fore-mast that I had to walk slowly and pick my way for fear of treading upon the men ; and when I reached the scuttle-butt—the one just before the galley, sir—I stood groping about for the dipper. I was feeling with my foot for it, as I fancied that it might have capsized off the scuttle-butt, when a pale, faint, yellowish light was thrown suddenly upon the deck ; and close up against the fore-mast I saw a wavering yellow outline that grew quickly into the likeness of a woman, with hair all over her shoulders, of the colour of the light, and large black eyes ; and her hands were clasped like those of a person’s beseeching you, but all below her waist flowed away in a sort of trembling yellow mist that faded into the darkness when it was

within a foot of the deck. As soon as ever the phantom became distinct, it unlocked its hands and made the sign of the cross with the first finger of its right hand, and then pointed upwards ; and though no sound came from it, yet I could see by the movement of its lips that it pronounced the word Philip. It faded away, with its finger pointing towards the sky ; and I stooped and picked up the dipper that I had noticed when the light first broke, and filled it and carried it aft to Mr. Chestree.'

At this point he was seized with a violent trembling, and I could judge the extent of the fit by the shaking of his hand as he raised his cap and placed it on his head.

I was never a superstitious man, although one of a class who, as a body, are reckoned so ; but though I did not in the least believe that any such spectre as Peacock painted had appeared to him, yet what with his gleaming eyes and the darkness, and the moan and wash of the water alongside, and the solemn shining of the stars, added to the story itself, and the horror that possessed the

youth in relating it, and his difficult breathing and the quivering of his body, I do admit that I was stirred and affected to a degree I could scarcely have believed possible in a mind so healthily fixed and (in spite of Shelvocke's good-natured ridicule) so purely prosaical at bottom as mine.

'Did you tell Chestree what you had seen?' I asked.

'Oh no, sir. I have mentioned it to no one but yourself.'

'Was it a dream, do you think? dreams are sometimes so lifelike, and so muddle one's waking experiences, that I have often asked myself whether such and such a thing really happened, or whether I had dreamed it.'

'No, no, it was not a dream, Mr. Madison,' he answered, shaking his head slowly, but with deliberate decision. 'I saw the dipper by the light the figure threw, so that I knew exactly where to put my hand upon it when the light faded.'

'Was the woman's face known to you?'

‘No, sir ; I had never seen the face before.’

‘And pray, Peacock,’ said I, knocking the ashes out of my pipe with a sharp rap, and feeling a little irritated by the involuntary sympathetic interest I had taken in this bit of ghostly nonsense, ‘why should this spectre give you any disturbance ? what do you want to pretend that a thing of this kind signifies ?’

He made no answer.

‘See here, Peacock : suppose, after worrying yourself over this matter until you felt inclined to hang yourself, you should find out that, at the very moment you spied your vision, a seaman had lighted a candle for one of the lanterns at some point of the deck from which the flame would fling such a light as you saw ; and suppose you could satisfy yourself that—the cause of the light given—all the rest of the phenomena of yellow hair and flame-coloured cheeks, and black eyes and moving hands, was caused by your startled and morbid imagination working upon a coil of rope, a couple of belaying pins, a back-

ground of bright mast, and a few twisting shadows; wouldn't you laugh at yourself for a donkey in allowing an illusion, scarcely alarming enough to frighten a female cook, to depress and agitate you?' .

He said he would be glad enough to find out that the thing he had seen had been caused in the way I suggested; and perhaps it might be as I supposed, too: any way he had told me the truth so far as he was concerned, and begged me to remember my promise not to repeat his story.

'Certainly, you may trust me,' I replied. 'And now, my lad, don't go hanging over this matter as though it were a thing of consequence. Treat it as a mere waking dream; one of those visions which come before a man with his eyes open. We're all of us dreaming, day and night; and for my part, if I had my choice of dreams, I would ask to see handsome women with yellow hair and black eyes—a lovely combination, Peacock: that is if the skin be *fair*—not sallow, like most of the foreign fair-haired women, as though a brunette should dye her hair golden—but whose

native complexion is always stamped on the back of her neck, you know.'

'Yes, sir, I know,' he answered, laughing a little, though I don't suppose he *did* know ; but I was glad to hear the laugh, and flattered myself my arguments had done him good.

At this moment eight bells were struck, and the watch below called. I went aft to take Chestree's place, and Peacock left the deck.

'Chestree,' said I, as he was shambling rather sullenly towards the companion ; his quarrel with Corney was not forgotten.

He stopped, and I drew near him.

'Will your memory carry you so far back as half-past four o'clock this morning ?' said I.

He tipped his hat over his eyebrow to scratch the back of his head, and looked at me as if he thought I was going to quiz him.

'What now, sir ? My memory's good for a few hours, I hope.'

'Shortly after you relieved me at four o'clock, you sent young Peacock to get you a drink of water ?'

'Ay, that's right,' he replied, staring at me

with surprise, and his arms hanging alongside of him like a recruit being drilled.

‘Did you see anything in the shape of a light betwixt the galley and the fore-mast during the time the youngster was forward?’

‘A light?’ he exclaimed. ‘What, do you mean a lantern-light?’

‘Yes.’

‘Such a light, for instance, as a candle would throw, sir?’

‘Yes, Chestree.’

‘No, sir, I didn’t.’

‘When Peacock brought you the water did he seem at all upset?’

‘What do you mean by upset, Mr. Madison?’

‘What’s the matter with you to-night, man? I ask, was there anything peculiar in Peacock—anything odd—anything to strike you as unusual in the lad’s manner when he came aft with the water?’

‘No, sir.’

I’m a fool to ask these questions, thought I; Chestree’s an honest man, but a complete blockhead, and I was turning away, when

after screwing his head round to make sure that Shelvocke was out of hearing, Chestree said :

‘ Pray, Mr. Madison, have you any notion of what Corney meant by saying that I was a man of no origin ?’

‘ It was only like hinting that your forefathers were not all of them probably members of the aristocracy.’

‘ I have been pondering over that observation, sir, and although it is no doubt as stupid a thing as could be said of a human being, yet there’s sometimes a great deal of malice even in stupidity, and I should like you to tell me, Mr. Madison, whether you think I ought to accept that remark from Mr. Corney as a reflection on my mother ?’

‘ No, the man never thought of your mother. If any member of your circle was in his mind at all it would be your grandfather. A man without an origin—in England—is a person who can only hope, without being able to prove, that his father was born before him.’

‘ Then you think, sir, there is nothing in Corney’s remark that I should be justified

in accepting as a reflection on my mother?' he inquired, with much anxiety expressed in his voice and posture.

'Nothing whatever.'

'I am very glad to hear you say so,' said he, and swung himself with some briskness through the companion.

Although I readily admit that old ruins, and churchyards, and desolate moors, and such places, are fine nurseries for human superstitions—shall I ever forget how the sight of a tall white goat browsing one evening on the green hillocks of an old churchyard made the sweat pour down my face, and started my heels as if the grapnel of a balloon had got foul of the hair of my head?—yet, if I wanted to enjoy what old midwives call the 'creeps and crawls' to perfection, I would choose for the liberation of my fancies a quiet night at sea, with a reddish half moon in the sky, and a slow, dark swell that is felt but not seen, as it rolls out of the mystical distances where heaven and ocean are mingled into one deep shadow, and when the illusion of the deep as a concavity in correspondence

with the sky that arches overhead is rendered more impressive by the clear and unbroken sparkling of the stars in the water.

I was in the midst of just such a scene as I walked quietly to and fro the deck of the *Tigress*, thinking over young Peacock's story; and could I only have brought my mind to admit the possibility of such a spectre as the boy had declared he looked on, the gentle sighing of the light breeze aloft, the sobbing of the water under the counter, the soft flapping of canvas like the rustling and rushing of invisible wings overhead, the silent deck, and the flitting figures of the look-out men in the bows, whose shapes were only determinable by the stars which they blotted out, would have supplied my fancies with a more thrilling spirit than ever the ghostly windmill, the rustling brake, the moonbeam shining through the embrasure of a ruin, or the shadow of a wind-tossed yew upon a gravestone, furnished to the imagination of a belated ploughman.

‘What a contrast with the scene of this morning, Madison!’ exclaimed Shelvocke,

coming up to me as I stood watching a white, gauze-like film creeping off the moon, and noticing how the stars in the immediate neighbourhood of the pearly planet waned and died in the silvery blue as she brightened.

‘Ay, sir, to look around upon this quiet night-scene makes the recollection of the foundered ship appear like a freak of the fancy. There is very little air abroad, to judge by the passage of that bit of haze across the moon.’

‘I am prepared for a calm. I am prepared for a long spell of inactivity. At least, I couldn’t feel more despondent if I knew *for certain* that no luck was to befall us for the next six months. I exceedingly regret the southing we have made. We really have no business down here, at least on *this* side. How do the spirits of the men appear to you?’

‘They seem lively enough, sir.’

‘I fancy this enforced idleness is telling upon the officers, though. If it had not been for Corney and Chestree at dinner, there

would not have been a laugh heard aft to-day.'

'I suppose the strongest-minded persons have their superstitious depressions at times, sir,' said I, my previous thoughts taking my words that way.

'Superstitious depressions!' he exclaimed. 'Who's superstitious? Not you, surely?'

'Oh, not in the least, sir. But don't you think despondency is always more or less superstitious?'

'I can't say I do. If I fret over the days passing without running us alongside a prize, I'm not superstitious, am I?' said he, chipping away with a flint and steel for a light for his cigar.

'Do you believe in ghosts, captain?'

I expected a laugh for an answer, instead of which he lighted his cigar, stowed the box away in his pocket, and after a considerable pause said :

'You put the question so seriously, that I'll give you a serious answer—I do believe in ghosts. Not in hobgoblins; not in your saucer-eyed, long-tailed figments. But I do

most firmly believe that the spirits of the dead revisit these cold glimpses of the moon, and that many persons have beheld such apparitions. Strange that you should have hit upon the subject, Madison. It's a strong faith in me, and has been with me as long as I can remember; though,' said he, grasping his beard and slowly passing his hand down it, 'no one would suspect a big, barbed fellow like me, who has been to sea all his life, and knocked about in the rudest and most unsentimental calling known to mortals, guilty of such a weakness.'

'Your confession certainly surprises me, sir. *I* do not believe in apparitions, but I really don't know why they *shouldn't* be believed in.'

'There are two reasons for my belief,' said he, seating himself with an air as though he relished the conversation. 'First of all, from the very earliest times—so far as my reading goes—all through scriptural, pagan, modern history, down to the present hour, the idea that ghosts—incorporeal essences as the dictionaries describe them—have appeared to

living beings, and that such existences are real has been deeply rooted ; the one article of faith in which the votaries of all sorts of creeds are agreed. There is hardly a country you can visit but that you will find this belief a settled conviction. What stronger testimony would you have ? I would to heaven there were the same concurrence of faith in deeper matters which puzzle me in the religion I belong to ! But I have another and surely a very conclusive reason for my belief.'

'And what may that be, sir ?' said I, observing him pause.

By the moonlight, that was now exceedingly clear and bright, I saw him looking at me intently. He removed his cigar from his mouth, and said in a low, grave, and steady voice :

'Credit my words or not, as you please, Madison : I have beheld a spirit with my own eyes.'

'*You*, sir !' I shouted, and I was rather thankful that I was too much astonished to laugh.

‘Yes, I, my friend. I have seen a spirit when my mind was as calm and collected as yours is now, when my pulse was as temperate and steady as health could make it, when my brain had been tautened and set up by the luff-tackles of a long and refreshing sleep, so that neither wine, nor a late supper, nor any of the rest of the unpoetical causes to which the sceptics assign the creation of ghosts, could have been at the bottom of the tremendous visitation.’

‘Why, captain,’ said I, impressed by the subdued energy of his manner, ‘if you tell me that you are serious, I will most dutifully believe that you have seen a ghost, although any other man’s most solemn assurance on such a subject would only set me laughing ; for if I know you at all, you are certainly not a person to be duped by your own imagination into a conviction so opposed to common sense.’

‘I am speaking the sober truth, Madison. That I have seen a spirit I do most solemnly declare.’

‘You amaze me, captain. May I ask what shape the spirit appeared in?’

He swung his leg and looked down. I was not sure that he heard me. He had forgotten his cigar, and his posture was one of deep self-engrossment. I never regretted anything more in my life than the promise I had made Peacock not to repeat his story ; as I should have amazingly liked to have Shelvocke’s judgment on the lad’s statement, the more especially as he himself was a believer in spirits, and took besides a strong interest in the boy.

‘Who was it that described a ghost as something of a shadowy being, captain?’ said I. ‘I suppose that is as exact a definition as could be ventured. But how can a shadow have a sex?—and yet you hear of male and female spectres.’

‘Oh, I can’t follow you into the physiology of ghosts,’ he rejoined, pulling out his tinder-box again and hammering at it as though he kept time to a tune. ‘And now, let me ask how happens it that so poetical a mind as yours should not believe in the apparition of

the dead ? Know you not those magnificent lines :

“ To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,
To the last syllable of recorded time ;
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death.”

What are our yesterdays but tombs ?—yet will you tell me that out of those tombs the dead do not steal to stare you in the face, taking such form and substance, gazing at you with looks so full of pity or scorn or sorrow or reproach, that the fleshly eye beholds nothing completer in skin and bone ? Suppose that the vessel in which Miss Palmer sailed from Cawsand Bay had foundered, and all aboard of her perished, a few hours after she had left the Sound—the girl would be dead as a nail now, wouldn't she ? Yet think of her, and observe how her face shall shape itself out of the substance—be it sunbright or dark as this water—upon which your eyes rest as you muse. Is that so ?

‘ Yes, sir ; but——’

‘ But me no buts ; I can guess your objec-

tion. You want your spectres to turn out in the conventional costumes, do you ?' he interrupted, in a lively mocking voice. ' You seek for your supernaturalism in scanty skirts, eh ? Your spirit must make its bow silvered over with a fine moonlike light, like the theatrical angels I once saw hovering round a tragedy-woman's death-bed at the Portsmouth Theatre. If that be your theory of ghosts, Madison, you need never lard your head to keep terror from stirring your hair Ay, our beautiful luck !' he muttered, as the main-sail flapped heavily ; ' let us be becalmed for a fortnight, and then get a breeze to blow us the news that treaties of peace have been signed by all the Powers.'

And so saying, he got up with a yawn and a long stretch of his arms, and, with a half-smothered laugh, lounged lazily over to the binnacles, where he stood for some minutes courting the wind by whistling through his teeth, and then went below, leaving me so much in doubt as to whether his talk about spirits had not been mere banter, in spite of his declarations of sincerity, that, to save

myself a heap of idle speculations, I let the subject fall from my mind.

The light air that had kept the water tinkling against the sides of the schooner now died completely out, and the long swell rolled in lines like liquid jet along the glassy sea, flashing back the silver of the moon as they passed under her, and sweeping onward in black ridges into the distant gloom. The vessel lifted and sank upon these heavings as noiselessly as a swing, unless now and again the canvas gave a smart flap, or a block squealed like a rat among the swaying spars ; but the water for the space of a fathom away all around was a beautiful sight, with the phosphorescent fires which, as the hull sank, shot out in tongues of flame, or in fibrine forms like the wreathing of innumerable tendrils of plants, and which, as the vessel was hove up, faded into green clouds like puffs of steam illuminated by blue light. It was like looking into a kaleidoscope to see the graceful writhings of these lovely though weird fires, and never had I been in a better mood to watch the play of the

mysterious radiance and to mark the wonderful luminous shapes which were formed—flitting, and fluctuating and nebulous visions, whose astonishing configurations admirably harmonised with the vast, unsearchable and ebony-coloured depths, on the polished surface of which they sported like brilliant summer-flies on some stream that runs darkling under the shadow of trees.

However, some time before midnight sentiment had been tired out of me. The dew lay so heavy on the decks that the starlight sparkled in them as though a shower of rain had fallen. I went right aft and squatted myself on the grating, waiting with impatience for midnight to be struck.

Suddenly, the man who held the tiller with both hands astern of him, and lolled against the head of it as though weary of standing, shifted his posture, and I saw him rear himself on tiptoe, and peer eagerly into the darkness right abeam.

‘What do you see, Andrews?’ said I.

‘Isn’t that a sail away down yonder, sir?’ he exclaimed, pointing with his long arm, so

that with his projected head and eager attitude he looked as if he were calling down a curse upon some distant object.

I peered and peered. Presently I was sure ; and went for the glass, and when the swell threw the schooner up, I could just make out a small dark shadow upon the gloomy water-line ; but I lost it instantly, and before I could ' fix ' it again, as the Yankees say, eight bells were struck. There was a shuffling and snorting and yawning along the decks ; a mass of human figures uncoiled themselves from behind the guns, from the scuppers, from the front of the galley ; the deck was heavily thumped, and a hoarse voice summoned the port watch to turn out.

I went below and roused up Chestree, and told him that we had just sighted a sail away on the port beam, and desired him to arouse Shelvocke on the first appearance of a breeze. So saying, I entered my berth, undressed myself, and lay down, leaving the door open that I might get the benefit of the draught of air that circled through the open port-hole each time the vessel rolled that way.

The wearing anxiety induced by the gale of the morning, coupled with the long and decidedly tedious watch I had just stood, had left me as sleepy as ever I had been in my life, and having consoled myself with the belief that there was small chance of a breeze springing up to close us with the vessel abeam, at any rate for the next hour or so, I dropped my head upon the pillow.

My senses were beginning to scatter, and I had lapsed into the imbecile stage of slumber when a man is sufficiently awake to hear a question asked, and sufficiently asleep not to know what he answers. Suddenly I found myself, with my eyes wide open, listening intently.

What was it?

A cry? a thump, as though a heavy block had fallen from aloft on to the deck?

Some peculiar noise had unquestionably startled me. I lay hearkening, but was too dead-tired to sustain that attention: my eyes closed again, and I fell sound asleep instantly, like a fortnight-old baby.

‘Hallo! confound it—let go, will you!’ I

shouted, dreaming ; and then sat bolt upright.
'What's the matter now ?'

The tall, gaunt figure of Chestree stood beside my bunk ; he held a lantern in his hand, and the yellow light shining upon his face made it resemble the imperfect lineaments of some ancient portrait glimmering out of a black background.

'A dreadful accident has just happened, sir. Mr. Peacock has fallen from the fore-top-sail-yard, and I am afraid he is killed.'

The news of a Frenchman or a Yankee being alongside would not have awakened me more effectually than this piece of intelligence. I jumped out of my bunk, and hastily clothed myself.

'Where is he ?' I asked.

'I left him on deck, sir. Corney is with him. Shall I call the captain ?'

'Wait till I hear what Corney says.'

I sprang up the companion-steps, followed by the second mate, and ran towards a group of men who were assembled abreast of the galley. One of them held a lantern, the light of which shone upon the motionless figure of

the poor lad lying on his back on the deck, with his head resting on the arm of a seaman, while Corney stooped over him.

Of all the dreadful, heart-breaking sights that ever I beheld, none that I can remember equalled the spectacle of mutilation exhibited by this lad. His face, so greatly admired by me for the beauty of the large, spiritual, eloquent, dark eyes, the square white forehead shaded by the clustering auburn tresses, the straight nose and delicately carven nostrils, was a crushed, shapeless, unrecognisable bloody mask. The sickened and horrified eye sought in vain for any semblance of humanity lingering amid the ghastly wreck. And still he was breathing! Father of pity, that such an object should yet have life in it!

The seaman who held the lantern thrust it into the hand of one of his mates, and covering his eyes, went reeling into the darkness, unable to stand the sight. Not a word was spoken. As I leant forward, Corney looked up at me, and then fixed his eyes upon the boy; and in perfect silence we stood around, our ears tortured by the breathing of what

veritably looked but a sod, whilst the dimly burning lantern kept the shadows dancing upon our aghast and pallid faces, heightening by the capricious twitchings the expression of horror in the eyes which peered around.

The breathing of the poor, crushed lad was as vigorous as that of a healthy man : but all on a sudden it stopped—it stopped so abruptly that every looker-on gave a start : and a cry rose up from our feet, a short, thick, half-smothered cry, and then a sputtering, suffocating cough ; a black stream that glistened like ink in the lantern-light crept from the head an inch or two along the deck ; there was a sharp quivering of the limbs, and the boy lay dead.

Corney was the first to speak.

‘It’s all over, sir, and the Lord be praised that it’s quickly over. The breathing of such a thing was shocking.’

‘How did this happen, Chestree ?’ I asked.

The poor fellow, who appeared quite broken down, looked at me as if he had the lock-jaw.

‘I sent him aloft,’ he answered, in a hollow voice, ‘to see what he could make of yonder

sail. He went briskly enough forwards, and I watched him jump into the fore-shrouds. A minute after I heard a crash, and a dark object rolled off the top of the galley on to the deck. I rushed forward, and saw'—his voice failed him, and he hid his face in his hands, trembling from head to foot.

'He struck the top o' the galley first, sir, exclaimed a seaman. 'I was lying just here, and his body rolled over with the send o' the swell, and dropped close alongside o' me. He spotted my face all over with his blood,' he added, passing his hands over his bronzed cheeks with a quick gesture, half of disgust and half of fear, and then slewing round to examine his palms by the light.

A sheet was procured, the lad's hammock brought up from the cabin in which it swung, the body placed in it, and a couple of seamen were about to carry it below into one of the spare after-berths, when Shelvocke arrived on deck.

'What have you got there, men?' he called out. 'What's the meaning of that lighted lantern? Where's the officer in charge?'

‘Here, sir,’ responded Chestree, and sidling up to me, he exclaimed, ‘For God’s sake, Mr. Madison, break the news to him! He was attached to that boy, sir. I’m an awkward fist at such work.’

I immediately walked up to Shelvocke.

‘Is that you, Madison?’ he sung out, as I approached.

‘Yes, sir.’

‘Why, what are you doing on deck in your watch below? What’s going forward, eh?’ he cried sharply.

‘A dreadful accident has just happened, sir. Mr. Peacock has fallen from the fore-topsail-yard, where he was sent to get a view of a strange sail, down yonder.’

There was a pause—it seemed to me a long one, though at such moments as these impressions are always exaggerated.

‘Fallen from the fore-topsail-yard!’ he exclaimed, turning his back upon the two men who had advanced as far as the main-hatch with their burden, and stood there holding it between them and waiting for further orders. ‘Is he—is he *much* hurt?’ he asked, in the

voice of a man who forces himself to pronounce words he abhors.

‘The fall, I deeply regret to say, has killed him, sir.’

‘*Killed him!*’ he shouted fiercely, turning upon me with a swiftness that might have passed for an action full of menace. ‘Do you tell me that Peacock is *dead*?’

‘Yes, sir,’

Though the feeble starlight gave me no more of his face than the shape and whiteness of it, I could *guess* its expression as he stood for many moments like one transfixed; stock-still, as though by some magic he had been converted into marble. A deep sigh broke from him, and his manner changed.

‘Who sent him aloft?’ he demanded.

‘I did, sir,’ responded Chestree, who had drawn near.

‘Then,’ said he, lifting his clenched fist as though he intended to strike the second mate, ‘you are his *murderer*, sir! his blood is on your head!’ and rearing himself to his full height, he thundered out in a voice positively hoarse with passion: ‘How *dare* you order

a delicate boy like him into that dark rigging !'

Chestree stood with his mouth wide open, utterly bewildered by this furious attack, and my own astonishment was supreme. That Shelvocke had a liking, nay, that he had even a fondness for the boy, furtively as it had been expressed, at least in my presence, I knew ; and no reasonable expression of sorrow on his part would have surprised me. But to hear him attack poor Chestree as a *murderer*, and watch him wrestling with sobs which appeared to rend his frame, was indeed to be the spectator of an extraordinary exhibition, and I was pretty sure from that moment that there was something deeper in this matter than had met either my eye or my ear.

He seemed, however, to realise the insanity of his conduct, or at least of his abuse of Chestree, for his hand fell to his side, and he muttered apologetically :

'Gentlemen, this is a dreadful blow—it is the unexpectedness of it that deprives me of the power to meet it as I should.'

‘Captain,’ exclaimed Chestree, in a hoarse tremulous voice, but very spunkily, ‘you were not fonder of that boy than I was, sir; and I would rather have lost my right arm than that this accident should have happened through my agency. But if you call me *murderer* for doing that which I have done a score of times, not in this schooner only, but in the ship he and I sailed in when he was a little fellow, you grievously wrong me, Captain Shelvocke—by heaven, you do, sir! and I would rather lie in irons for the rest of the cruise, and forfeit every penny of the prize-money I have earned aboard the *Tigress*, than suffer such an attack, such an unjust attack, upon my character at your hands again, sir.’

And the poor fellow sniffed and snuffled as though he were shedding tears.

‘Say no more, Chestree,’ answered Shelvocke in a broken voice. ‘I was hasty—I ask your pardon; I know you were fond of the boy’—the rest of the sentence stuck in his throat. And turning to me he said, ‘Let the body be taken below, Madison—placed in

the spare berth next to mine ;' and he walked right aft, and stood with his back towards us, and never stirred from that posture until the men returned from depositing their melancholy burden, when he quitted the deck.

The calm was still as profound as when the watch below had been called ; the schooner, probably had not drifted her own length in that time. I took the glass to scrutinise the strange sail in the north-east, but could make nothing of the minute dusky patch. Some men were swabbing the deck where the body had fallen, and as the lantern-light by which they worked glanced upon the foot of the fore-mast, the recollection of the apparition that had appeared to Peacock rushed upon me, and one of those swift shudders which seem to thicken the blood and make the senses cold passed through me, though I promptly checked the feeling and recovered myself.

Observing me to remain on deck, Chestree came out of the waist, moving with such a slow, bruised, and dejected air that the most

expert mute in advance of a hearse could not have carried himself more dolorously.

‘Come, Chestree, take heart,’ said I. ‘You could no more have helped this terrible accident from befalling the poor boy than you could have stopped a cannon-ball from killing him in an action.’

‘I know that, sir ; but it is a fearful thing to be called a murderer, Mr. Madison, and I do feel that Peacock would be alive now if I had not sent him aloft.’

‘For calling you a murderer, Captain Shelvocke has apologised, and his regret ought to satisfy you. You saw how deeply affected he was, and a man in that state of mind should not be held responsible for every word he utters. As to your assertion that Peacock would still be alive had not you ordered him aloft, all that I can say is you are the cleverest man in the world if your foresight can provide against other people’s misfortunes. So forget Shelvocke’s language, and clear your conscience of all sense of the responsibility of the lad’s death.’

‘Well, sir, you are no doubt right ; but it

will take me some time to balance my mind afresh,' said he, in a sort of groaning voice. 'I've seen a number of accidents in my time, and some dreadful deaths by wounds; but nothing ever shocked me so much as this. I wouldn't mind if he had been killed by a ball or a pike at my side; a brave or fair death like that wouldn't make me feel that I would give ten guineas to be able to clear the tears out of my throat. But to fall like a sack from that fearful height,' he exclaimed, looking up at the yards towering into the gloom; 'to see his beautiful face bashed like a ripe pear chucked against the wall; to think of his plucky little soul being dismissed from this world by a mere *rigger's* accident—oh Lord! oh dear! it's enough to melt the heart of a shark!'

His grief was so lively that it twisted him about on his legs as though somebody were shaking him by the scruff of his neck; and he plucked at various parts of his garments with his long claws, like a drunken man trying to undress himself.

'But who would have imagined,' he continued, 'that Captain Shelvocke would take it

so much to heart? He didn't know him so well as I. *He* never boxed an apprentice's ears for saucing the poor little chap. *He's* never lain alongside of him hammock to hammock, and listened to him yarning about what he'd do when he came to be a man, as I have. But the Lord be praised! he leaves no mother to break her heart over his going. He's gone to a place where he'll hear no jokes about his parents, and never be made to blush for other people's sins, and where they'll not belay his singing, nor prevent him from looking as glorified as the other angels because he's a natural child.'

And burying his nose in a large pocket-handkerchief, he blew a loud and long blast, and, apparently relieved, looked around to see if there was any wind coming.

There was nothing now to detain me on deck; and though I did not feel particularly sleepy, I went below with the intention of lying down; but on reaching the cabin I saw Shelvocke issue from the berth in which the body had been placed, holding a small hand-lamp, and he called to me in a whisper.

I followed him into his own cabin. Apparently too overcome to speak, he pointed to a chair alongside a table strewn with papers, charts, and nautical instruments ; and taking a flask of brandy from a shelf over his bunk, he poured out a full dram and swallowed it, though I was struck by the trembling of his hand as he raised the glass.

‘I have just been to look at the body,’ said he, speaking in a low voice that his want of self-control might be the better concealed : ‘death must have been instantaneous.’

‘To all intents and purposes it was so, sir, no doubt.’

‘What a wreck ! who could conceive that the missing of a rope, the slipping of a foot, could crush God’s most beautiful image into such—into *such* an object !’ He passed his handkerchief over his forehead.

‘Mr. Chestree is deeply affected,’ said I, ‘by this dreadful misfortune. I believe he was really fond of the lad, sir, though one would not suppose that much tenderness could lie in so uncouth a cover. He is also greatly pained by your grief, as indeed I am, sir.’

‘My grief!’ he exclaimed, looking at me with a singular expression. ‘I dare say you are both *surprised* as well as pained. It does seem strange, no doubt, that the captain of a vessel should be stricken down by the death of one of his junior officers. One does not look for such strong sensibility among plain seamen.’

I made him no answer.

‘But this boy had particular claims upon me,’ he continued. ‘I knew his mother, Madison. She died when he was a baby, and as he had no knowledge of his father, he was but an orphan, as you can see : and what is there under heaven more appealing than a little helpless orphan? His story interested me, and ever since his mother died I have watched over him, and I know now—I know *now* that I loved him. Oh my God! what is there more detestable than moral cowardice? What sort of a hero is he who, having the reputation of such bravery as gunpowder and cutlasses inspire in a man, fears to do an act of justice, shrinks from righting those whom he has wronged, and suffers his wicked selfish-

ness to cripple, ay, and to blast, the happiness of innocent beings who love him? Ask me why the death of young Peacock has prostrated me even as you see:—*he was my son.*'

I looked at him steadily.

'What! you have guessed the secret all along.'

'No, sir.'

'He was the son of a woman whom I adored, neglected, and whose heart I broke. He never knew that I was his father, though had he survived me, my will would have proclaimed the truth. No! it was from no cowardly feeling that I held my secret from him. I kept my counsel to save him the shame of the discovery, hoping that I might be spared to such an age that, when at last the truth was told him, he would be a man in years, with a man's fortitude to meet and despise those sneers and shrugs which are so killingly cruel in boyhood, and with money enough to purchase that marketable thing, the world's esteem. He was a bright lad, as clever as he was handsome—he had his mother's eyes. God alone knows the pride I

took in him, and how keen that pride was made by concealment.'

'Yet it was certainly known to him that his mother was not a wedded woman, sir.'

'I heard that from you first. The captain to whom I apprenticed him—the only man to whom I told the story—must have blabbed; otherwise how should the boy have known?'

'Unless,' said I, making the observation merely to introduce the subject without violence, 'he had learnt it by the metaphysical means of which Macbeth speaks.'

'What do you mean?' he inquired, staring at me fixedly.

'Why, sir, I believe he was a ghost-seer, a quality in him that your admissions last night and your confessions now make intelligible.

'How do you know?' he exclaimed impatiently.

'I asked him yesterday evening,' said I, speaking almost in a whisper—for the mystery of that visitation, coupled with the proximity of the dead body, subdued me, in spite of myself—'what was the cause of his depression. I think you noticed how dull he was at din-

ner. After some conversation I succeeded in getting him to confess that in yesterday morning's watch, before daybreak, he had gone forward on an errand, and whilst standing near the fore-mast he beheld a light that brightened into a human face, the lips of which pronounced his name, whilst she pointed up after making the sign of the cross.'

'His *name* !' he exclaimed in a long-drawn thrilling whisper. 'What name ?'

'Philip.'

'Merely Philip ?'

'That was all, sir.'

'Did he describe the vision ?' he asked, whilst I saw the sweat gathering upon his forehead in large gout.

'He did. He represented the face as pale, with black eyes and yellow hair.'

'Ay,' he muttered, 'and she appeared to me too.'

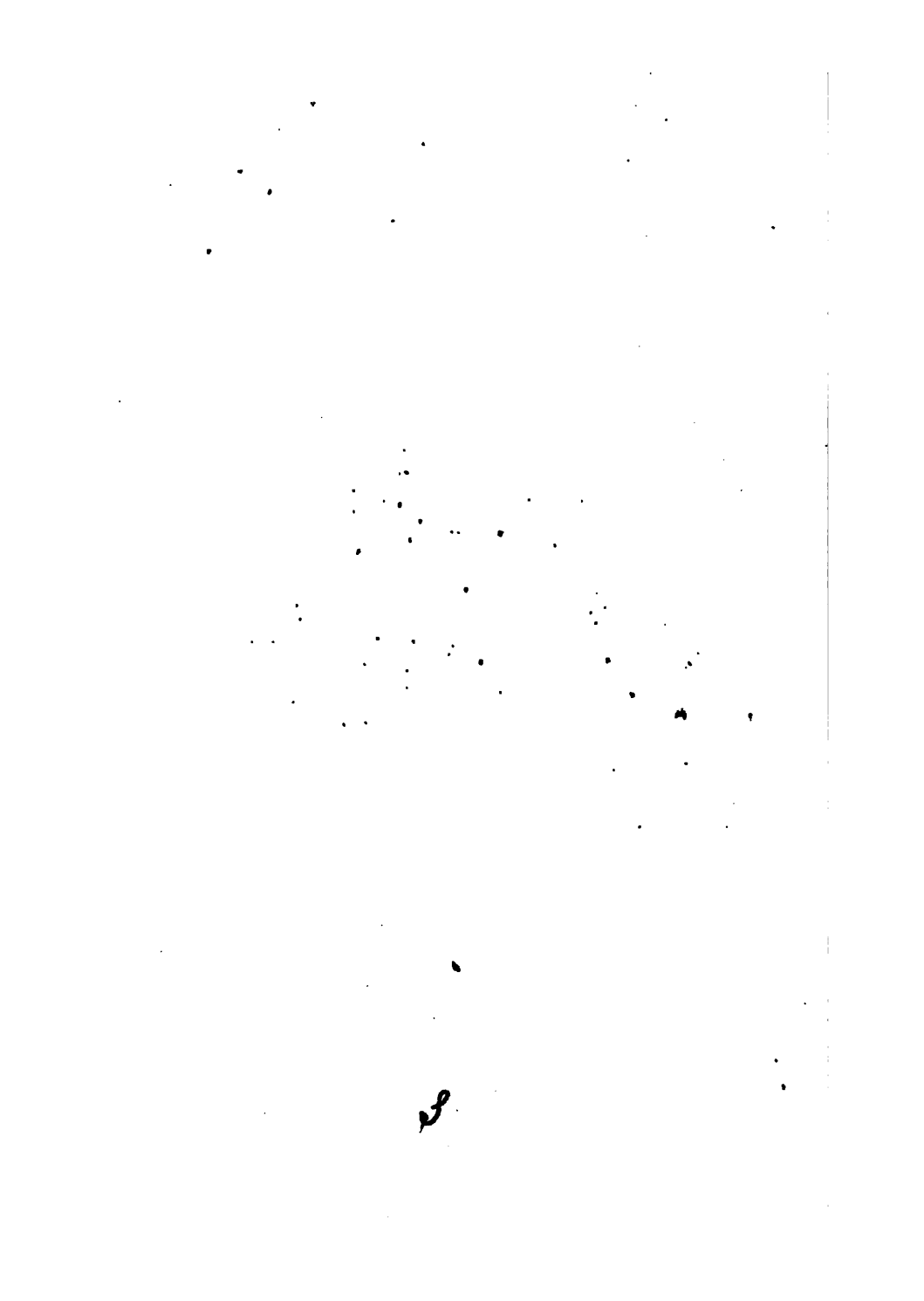
He clasped his hands tightly and leant back, with his eyes lifted to the cabin ceiling. I rose, thinking I had stayed long enough. He looked at me with a lack-lustre eye and said : 'Are you going, Madison ?'

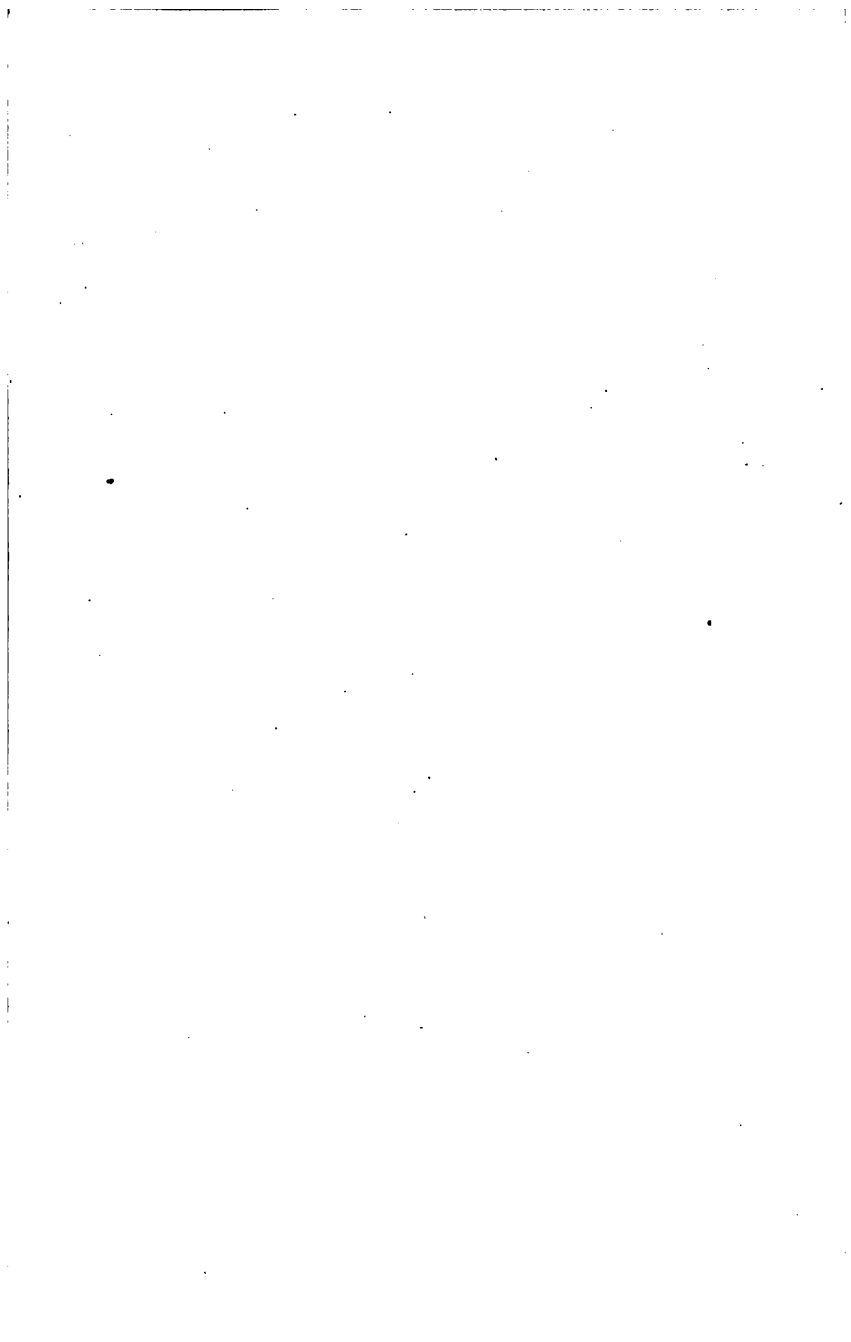
‘Yes, sir.’

‘Well, I thank you for your sympathy. And now from this moment, please let no further words pass between us on this subject.’

I bowed. He extended his hand, and I shook it; but the moment I liberated it he locked his fingers afresh, and lay back in his chair with his eyes raised; and this was his posture when I left him.

END OF VOL. II.





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